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**IMPLICATIONS OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT IN A SPA BUSINESS
SETTING – THE CASE OF ITALIAN SPAS**

Master Thesis

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This Master thesis has been compiled independently. All works by other authors used while compiling the thesis as well as principles and data from literary and other sources have been referred to.

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INTRODUCTION

An increasing awareness on health-related lifestyle, widening choice of services, and the rise of peoples' socio-economic wellbeing is constantly raising a demand for wellness tourism, thus there is a growing need for high-quality services that meet the expectations of the knowledgeable and demanding clientele. In hospitality industry, where the service delivery is characterised by active participation of employees interacting with the guests, the managers are constantly challenged to operate their staff to perform above expectations and deliver the services effectively and in customer-satisfying manner (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2013; Kandampully, 2014).

Under such circumstances, employee empowerment is considered one of the important factors that affects the operations of service organizations to achieve success among multitude of competitors in the era of globalization (Dehghani, 2014, p. 1130; Kruja et al., 2016, p. 26). Acknowledging the importance of empowering the employees to work professionally and efficiently would be essential in reaching competitive advantage among other service providers. Therefore, the present master thesis focuses on the theoretical approaches and practical implications of employee empowerment in hospitality business environment.

In the end of 1980s, the studies on management skills started to propose employee empowerment as a main component of managerial and organisational effectiveness (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p. 471). Successively, the topic of empowerment has been studied increasingly in the service industry where many researchers have proven the positive impact of empowerment on employees' level of motivation and job satisfaction. At the same time, the researchers often referred to the need for further research on the topic in the hospitality sector. (Armache, 2013; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Eylon & Au, 1999; Kapiki, 2012; Lashley, 1995, 2001; Spreitzer, 1995)

Thematic research done in the hospitality sector has involved mostly the frontline employees in the hotels and restaurants (Gill et al., 2010; Hocutt & Stone, 1998; Kruja et al. 2016; McDonald, 2004; Namasivayam, et al., 2014; Odeh, 2008; Shahril et al., 2013). Research on managerial strategies and employee empowerment in spa and wellness business settings is, however, considerably scarce (Bielanski et al., 2011; Meng & Han, 2014). Hence, a gap has been detected in the research about implications of empowerment techniques in a spa business setting. Thus, the current thesis proposes to study the topic of empowerment in the spa context involving spa managers and spa-therapists – the employees who are in a direct contact with the customers.

Accordingly, the problem lies in the scarce use of opportunities that would result from applying empowerment principles in the spa business setting. Thus, the present master thesis seeks to answer the problem question on how knowledgeable application of employee empowerment would affect employee motivation and job satisfaction, thus enabling high customer satisfaction and leading to higher productivity. The problem is discussed on the basis of the research findings from the comparative case study on employee empowerment in the spas in Italy and relevant literature review on the topic. The research involves spa therapists and spa managers of the spas in the Mediterranean, Alpine and capital region of Italy.

The goal of the master thesis is to provide the spa managers with the recommendations for implementing employee empowerment principles in a spa business setting. The suggestions are based on the critical literature review and the study results. The research questions are the following:

- 1) How do the spa managers acknowledge and apply the principles of employee empowerment in their spa business setting?
- 2) What are the spa-therapists' expectations and actual perceptions on employee empowerment in their work environment?

To achieve the goal of the thesis and answer the research questions, the research tasks have been set as follows: 1) review and analysis of thematic literature on employee empowerment in service industry; 2) preparation and conduct of research (comparative

case study of employee empowerment in Italian spas); 3) data analysis and presentation of study results; and 4) discussion of the study results and presentation of recommendations for applying empowerment principles in a spa business setting.

Based on the findings from the literature review and previous studies, the present research discusses the topic on such fields as concept of empowerment, values and goals, motivation and job satisfaction, communication and information exchange, rights and responsibilities, employee involvement, training and skills, and feedback. By contrasting the spa therapists' expectations and their actual experience on empowerment, and comparing the results with their manager's point of view, the author aims to present the areas where employees' expectations and real life experiences vary the most, and detect the topics that the managers perceive differently. Afterwards, based on the study results and findings from the research done in the field, the thesis provides recommendations for implementing empowerment principles in a spa business setting.

The master thesis consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references with 67 sources, 4 appendices and a summary in Estonian. The main body of the paper includes 9 figures and 11 tables. The first part of the thesis provides a theoretical framework of employee empowerment based on the thematic literature review and the results of the previous studies. The subchapters entail the development of the concept and different approaches to employee empowerment with possible risk areas of empowerment. The second chapter introduces research methodology – a comparative case study conveyed by interviews with the spa managers and written survey questionnaires as the instruments for studying implications of employee empowerment in Italian spa business setting. The subchapters present the mixed method data analysis – deductive content analysis of semi-structured interviews and a statistical analysis with Excel 2013 software application of written questionnaires, and presentation of study results. The third chapter elaborates on the discussion of study results in relation to the literature findings and presents recommendations for implementing employee empowerment in a spa business setting. Finally, the conclusion gives an overview of the research, its limitations and suggestions for future research.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

1.1. Development of the concept and implications of employee empowerment

The current chapter is based on a critical literature review and gives an overview of the development of the concept and different approaches of empowerment. Alongside with examining the ways of applying employee empowerment, the literature review prescribes possible actions for the implementation of employee empowerment, as well as possible risks and drawbacks of implementing empowerment in work environment.

Several studies on empowerment have been conducted in American and Asian business settings; thus, considerable part of the literature review outlines the work of the researchers from the USA and Asian countries (e.g. works of Armache, 2013; Boella and Goss-Turner, 2013; Kandampulli, Mok, and Sparks, 2001; Koc, 2013; Kruja, Ha, Drishti and Oelfke, 2016; Lashley, 1995, 2001; Meng and Han, 2014; Ye, 2012). As empowerment-related theories started to emerge into managerial strategies in the mid-1980s and 1990s, and were closely connected to the motivational theories, the present research often refers to the original works of Maslow (1954), Conger and Kanungo (1988), Lashley (1995, 2001), Spreitzer (1995) and Kandampully et al (2001).

Empowerment has been approached in both the management and psychology literature and research. The concept has been defined differently by various authors, while the first usage of the term is often related to an American social scientist Julian Rappaport, who introduced the idea of empowerment in the field of community psychology as ‘an aim to enhance the possibilities for people to control their own lives’ (Rappaport, 1981, p. 15). From that on, an increasing amount of empirical work has been done on empowerment; however, mostly it was focused at individual level and less at organisational level (Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992).

Conger and Kanungo are considered to have been among the first to clarify and describe the construct of empowerment by defining empowerment in terms of motivational processes in employees (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 666). Accordingly, by explaining the process of empowerment through integrating theory and practice, Conger and Kanungo (1988, p. 474) referred to employee empowerment as a ‘process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification and removal of conditions that foster powerlessness’. During the following decades, empowerment was increasingly pointed out in relation to progressive managerial strategies due to such benefits as quicker and reasonable decision-making, innovative thinking, increased service-quality and positive impact on employees’ job satisfaction (Yukl and Becker, 2006, p. 210).

Managing the human resources regards a purposeful guidance of human activities with the purpose of reaching the organisational goals. As stated by Skinner & Ivancevich (1992), the classical approach to management and human relations, developed by the early 20th century theoretician Mary Parker Follett, refers to the essence of management as the kind of art of making things happen through people. Thus, the managers aiming to high-quality service delivery are expected to provide their employees with knowledge and skills needed for performing the job tasks according or above the expectations.

While examining implications of empowerment and its relevance to management and organisations, van Oudtshoorn and Thomas (1995) discussed advantages and disadvantages of empowerment and disempowerment. Characteristics associated with the extreme states of empowerment and disempowerment are displayed in Table 1.1. Their study explained various states of empowerment in the light of business organisations that, according to their findings, usually function in a way that there are no thoroughly empowered or disempowered employees. However, organisations that apply clarifying, coaching and counselling as part of their managerial strategies have been considered effectively moving towards an empowered staff (van Oudtshoorn & Thomas, 1995, p. 25). Moreover, as stated by Lashley (2001, p. 11), ‘for both

employees and employers empowerment is said to offer a chance to overcome the wasteful rigidities of traditional disempowering organisations’.

Table 1.1 States of empowerment and disempowerment

| Associated with empowerment | Associated with disempowerment |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Accepting of responsibility | Avoiding taking responsibility |
| Being active | Being passive |
| Boldness | Timidity |
| Creative | Conventional |
| Energetic | Lethargic |
| Enjoys life | Gets little joy out of life |
| Happy | Depressed and miserable |
| Healthy | Many health problems |
| Imaginative | Dull and unimaginative |
| Independent | Dependent |
| Individualistic | Conforming |
| Innovative | Sticks to routines |
| Interesting | Dull and boring |
| Motivated | Unmotivated |
| Prepared to take risks | Reluctant to take risks |
| Observant | Unobservant |
| Satisfied with job | Frustrated in job |
| Sensitive to subtleties | Not sensitive to subtleties |
| Uses full potential as a human being | Uses only a fraction of potential |
| Uses intelligence to the full | Does not use intelligence to the full |

Source: Van Oudtshoorn and Thomas, 1995, p. 27.

The beginning of the 21st century is often referred to as an era of globalisation with increased competition in the field, pressure of offering innovative and experience-like services, accompanied by increased levels of work-related stress, high turnover rates, and struggle in reaching life-work balance. In such business environment, more emphasise has been paid to the ways empowerment processes might work in organisations (Zimmermann, Israel, Sculz, & Checkoway, 1992, p. 718). By determining and treating the conditions that would lead to the psychological state of powerlessness, diminishing the number of levels of management can lead to taking greater responsibility and looking beyond one’s ordinary daily work tasks.

Thus, delayering would develop new work-relations and job divisions, and the power for making decisions is transmitted also to the other employees besides managers. Successively, through increased involvement, the employees are empowered and the work processes could be improved. (Swart, Mann, Brown, & Price, 2005, p. 17) When the number of management levels have been reduced and the subordinates have been given more responsibility, the roles of management change – instead of dictating and controlling, coaching and inspiring would become their important roles (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2013, p. 39). Moreover, Kruja et al. (2016, p. 26) argue that empowered employee is the one with exceptional professional skills accompanied by sufficient amount of knowledge and autonomy to make appropriate decisions that otherwise would have been within the capabilities and authority of their managers.

Since the mid-1990s, the concept of empowerment has gained increasing attention in the field of hospitality. The International Encyclopedia of Hospitality Management defines the concept of empowerment as follows:

‘Generally regarded as a method for promoting greater employee involvement, empowerment is argued to lead to greater organizational success through engaging the employee in the decision-making process. The focus is on providing employees with opportunities to have greater freedom, autonomy and self-control over various aspects of their work, whilst at the same time being encouraged to think creatively and take risks to respond quickly to work situations’ (Cannon, 2005, p. 198).

As traditional hospitality organisations tend to face problematic situations due to disempowerment, Lashley (1995) firstly pointed out relevant benefits of empowerment and the problems of disempowerment in hospitality operations (see Table 1.2). Yet, whether or not a certain initiative which is supposed to empower employees will become successful, Lashley has suggested that ‘it will be judged by the extent to which it enables the empowered to feel personally effective, able to determine outcomes, and to have a degree of control over significant aspects of their working life’ (1995, p. 32).

Table 1.2. Benefits of empowerment and problems of disempowerment in hospitality businesses

| BENEFITS OF EMPOWERMENT | PROBLEMS OF DISEMPOWERMENT |
|--------------------------------|---|
| More responsive service | Limited authority to meet |
| Complaints dealt with quickly | Complaints dealt with slowly through senior manager |
| Greater customer satisfaction | High level of costs in generating new customers |
| Well-motivated staff | Low morale and poor motivation |
| Improved labour stability | High labour turnover |
| Increased productivity | Low productivity |
| Lower labour costs | Low wages but high labour costs |
| High quality | Low quality |
| High profits | Low profits |

Source: Lashley, 1995, p. 32

While integrating the theory and practice of applying empowerment at the worksite, Conger and Kanungo (1988) were the first to offer a framework to explain the process of empowerment and initiate research about more direct connection between empowerment practices and leadership. Accordingly, their five-step process of empowerment (see Figure 1.1) could be used whenever some implications of powerlessness have been detected and some tactics would be needed to remove them.

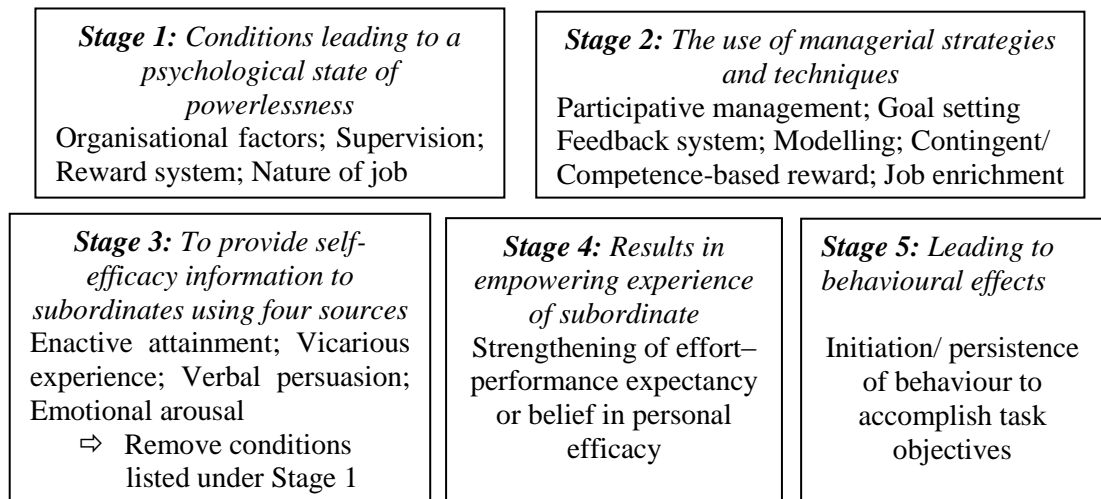


Figure 1.1. Five stages of empowerment process (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p. 475).

Compiled by the author.

According to the empowerment process, by applying five different stages, a systematic application of empowerment strategy was seen as a way to move from ‘detecting the cause for powerlessness among the subordinates to resulting in behavioural changes to accomplish the further tasks with efficacy and self-confidence’ (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, pp. 474–475).

Depending on whether the employees are empowered by being involved in the decision-making processes of their organisation or by acknowledging their inner strength and problem-solving skills, empowerment can be considered through different approaches (Armache, 2013; Kruja et al., 2016; Meng & Han, 2014). The following provides an overview of different perspectives on empowerment.

Armache (2013) has pointed out three slightly different approaches – structural, leadership, and motivational approach – which complement each other by providing an alternative understanding of empowerment in the workplace. Accordingly, the most traditional approach is known as structural approach where empowerment is understood as giving somebody else the power and decision-making authority. Usually, decision-making authority is passed down the organisational hierarchy and the employees are granted with more power to decide outside their usual field of action. Structural empowerment involves the decisions made by organizational executives to pass some decision making power from managers to the employees on the operational levels by giving them information and rights to make decisions on wider area than their direct area of usual operation (Wilson, 2011, p.100). The leadership approach focuses on the energising feature of empowerment. Good leaders energise and inspire the subordinates to share their vision and innovative ideas. They encourage employees to take on challenges and feel that they participate in the progress of changing the organisation. (Lashley, 1995, 2002; Spreitzer, 1995)

In addition to the given approaches, many researchers have focused on the effects of empowerment from the psychological aspects. Psychological empowerment refers to the degree to which employees consider they are empowered (Wilson, 2011, p. 106).

While elaborating on psychological empowerment, thematic literature usually indicates four components: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Lashley, 1995, 2001; Spreitzer, 1995; Swart et al., 2005; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Zimmerman, 2002). Spreitzer (1995), who developed a measure of psychological empowerment in the workplace, has explained the empowerment dimensions as follows the notions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. Accordingly, he explained ‘meaning’ as a value of a mission goal or aim judged in relation to individual’s own ideals of standards; ‘competence’ as an individual’s belief in his or her capability to act task activities cleverly; ‘self-determination’ as an autonomy in initiation and continuation of work behaviours and processes; and ‘impact’ as an influence on work outcomes, the perception of the degree to which people can affect certain outcomes of their job. From that on, other researchers have focused on studying empowerment through some of the aforementioned notions. For example, Meng and Han (2014) led in-depth research on the role of empowerment on one’s psychological responses regarding job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job dedication and turnover intention. According to their study results, ‘meaning’ as a first dimension proposed by Spreitzer (1995) was a main factor affecting job satisfaction, ‘moral commitment’ made employees show less job dedication and affective commitment decreased turnover intention.

Following the former proposal by Spreitzer (1995, p. 1442) that people become more interested in psychological empowerment when ‘global competition and change require employee initiative and innovation’, the later findings show that effective human-resources practices directly influence employee satisfaction, organisational commitment and, consequently, organisational effectiveness (Armache, 2013; Gill et al., 2010; Wilson, 2011). In addition, Schein (as cited in Lashley, 2001, p. 5) proposed to consider empowerment as ‘an attempt to establish moral involvement which means that the person intrinsically values the mission of the organisation and his or her job, and is personally involved and identifies with the organisation’.

Motivational approach refers to empowerment as a ‘process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organisational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organisational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information’ (Armache, 2013, p. 22). As motivational aspect has been often pointed out in relation to the feeling of empowerment throughout the thematic research, the following presents closer insight into motivational theories that have formed a basis to the motivational managerial approach.

Motivational approach is based on the motivational theories firstly introduced by Abraham M. Maslow and then developed by Clayton Alderfer with introducing his ERG-model to show relatedness between one’s existential and growth needs (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Maslow, 1954). Employee motivators were described in the context of industrial environment by Frederick Herzberg, who elaborated on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs by introducing a two-factor motivational theory (Kandampully et al., 2001, pp. 226–227). Maslow's hierarchy of needs that was first introduced in 1943 has remained a popular framework in sociology, psychology as well as management research throughout the years. According to Maslow’s perception, people need to develop progressively – only after the basic needs have been satisfied, the person is aiming at achievement on higher levels. The closer one gets to fulfill the needs on one level, the more attractive become the higher needs. (Maslow, 1954)

Maslow himself as well as other researchers have criticised the fixed order of hierarchy adding that it should not be seen as a rigid continuum (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Harrigan & Commons, 2015; Kandampully et al., 2001; Maslow, 1954). Accordingly, there have been always exceptions. For example, self-esteem being more valued than being loved, innately creative people having creativeness not as a means of self-actualisation but basic means, some people might have permanently lowered their level of aspiration while coming from basic living conditions and being satisfied with the rest of their life without aiming at high level achievements (Maslow, 1954, pp. 51–53).

Considering the possible limitations to his approach and moving on from Maslow's theory, Alderfer presented his ERG-theory that pointed at the relationship between one's motivational needs through three levels – existence, relatedness and growth needs, showing that more than one need is functioning at the same time. Later on, Herzberg elaborated on the motivational theory in the context of working organisations by presenting a two-factor model. (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002) Referring to Maslow's original theory of needs (1954), employees' lower-level needs must be satisfied first (e.g. minimum salary level, safe work conditions). However, to be motivated to work more efficiently they look for achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and the nature of the work itself.

Thus, Herzberg moved on with introducing a new dimension to the motivational theory by the idea of a certain set of factors (called 'hygiene factors') that do not necessarily lead to high job satisfaction but their absence leads to dissatisfaction. In order to increase employee motivation, Herzberg argued that eliminating dissatisfaction is only half of the managerial work – people are genuinely motivated only by intrinsic conditions of the job, such as interesting work, appreciation of one's work, meaningful job, feeling important to the organisation, having responsibility and right to make decisions. (Lyons, 2007; Kandampully et al., 2001)

Relating motivational theories to the essence of empowerment, in managing work situations it should be noted that it is not a matter-of-fact assumption that by decreasing the amount of dissatisfying factors the employees' job satisfaction and productivity would grow in concordance. Good work conditions, competitive salary, clear work tasks and good relationship with co-workers and employer are essential for job satisfaction. However, better job performance, increased profitability and higher quality in service provision, would only be reached if employees were genuinely motivated by recognition, achievement, increasing responsibility and personal development. (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Gill et al., 2010; Kandampully, 2014) Applicability of motivational theories in relation to the work environment is presented on Figure 1.2.

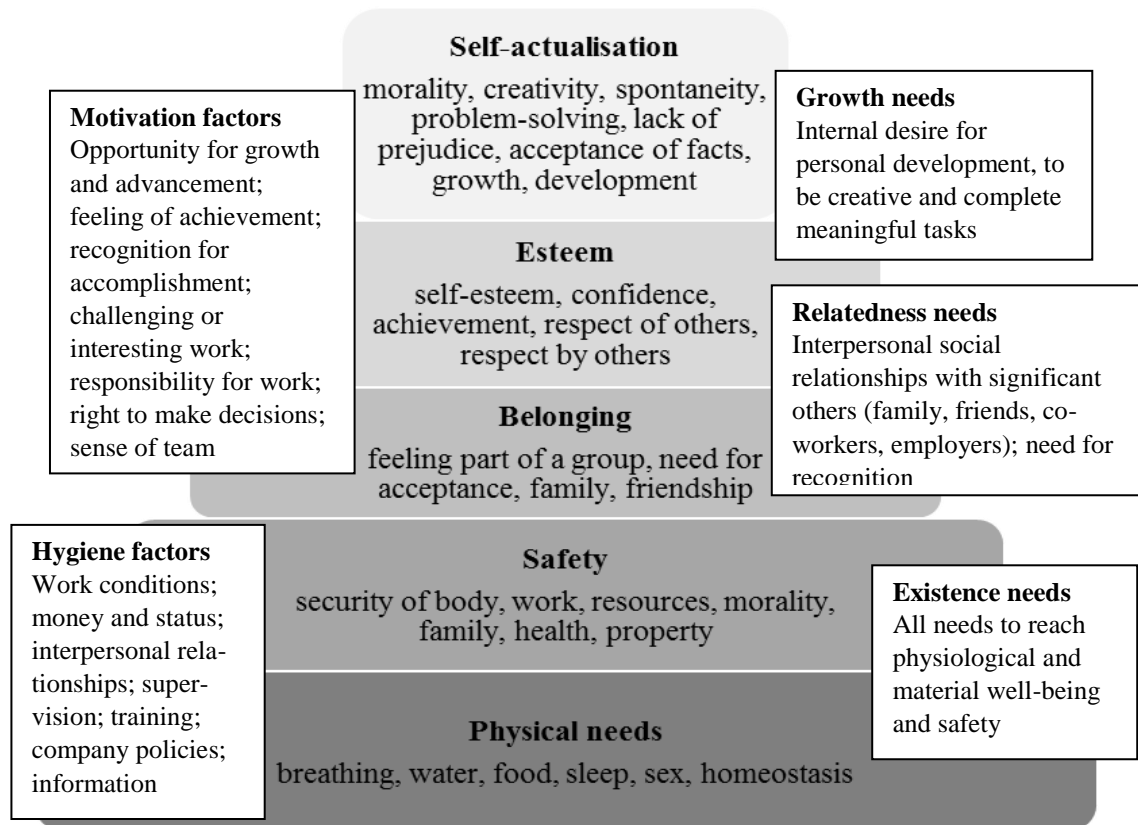


Figure 1.2. Maslow's hierarchy of needs applied in work environment through Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory and Alderfer's ERG-model. Source: Adapted from Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Lyons, 2007; Maslow, 1954. Compiled by the author.

Besides acknowledging a strong link between motivational theories and practices with implications of employee empowerment in work environments, in recent years, 'empowerment' has been discussed as a leadership style next to such traditionally known styles as autocratic or authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire type management style (Kandampully, 2014; Navasivayam, et al., 2014). Empowering leader is characterised by 'giving clear lines of authority/ discretion to employees within the parameters of their jobs' (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2013, p. 27). Bacon (2006, pp. 146–149) has listed a set of boundaries that need a clear formulation and insurance that those boundaries would not be violated by anybody. According to Bacon's (*Ibid.*) propositions for acknowledging the importance of clear understanding about one's rights and responsibilities, the most serious boundary violations are usually related to

ethics, self-respect, insensitive behaviour, responsibility, and privacy. Knowing and respecting everyone's boundaries provides employees with an acceptable scope of actions for proper decision-making and reasonable amount of responsibility (D'Angelo, 2006, p. 291). In addition, scholars like Kim et al (2012, p. 12) have proposed that empowering the employees could feature as a demonstration of the value the company places on its employees. Moreover, their research has showed that management trustworthiness is an outcome of employee empowerment, which, in its turn, should be seen as an essential element of organizational commitment (*Ibid.*).

Accordingly, empowerment has emerged to the managerial strategies, thus pointing at usefulness of initiatives by the managers to continuously allocate resources to the implementation of empowerment programmes. After describing the theoretical background and elaborating on different approaches to applying empowerment as a managerial strategy to enhance one's efficacy and gain higher productivity, the following chapter points at possible risk areas involved with empowerment.

1.2. Possible risk areas of employee empowerment

Though empowerment has been increasingly acknowledged as an important factor in helping to gain competitive advantage and reach the company's goals, the actual implementation of empowerment is often impeded by various factors. Already Conger and Kanungo, who firstly offered a structured framework to study empowerment in organisational contexts, proposed that managerial strategies with empowerment practices might have also negative effects, such as leading to employees' overconfidence and misjudgements on situations that would need professional handling (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p. 480). Lashley (2001), who later developed the topic of empowerment in relation to the hospitality industry, noted that frequently different forms of empowerment had been avoided, thus leading to the use of over-simplified versions of empowerment whether solely passing on the responsibility or asking employees to take decisions on-site more effectively. The following presents an overview of possible risk areas while applying empowerment in work environment.

In general, research in the field of employee empowerment has revealed three main risk areas while applying empowerment in increasing subordinate's motivation and improving their work performance. According to Men and Han (2014), Spreizer (1995) and Ye (2012), the main risks while applying empowerment techniques involve the issue of trust, manager's own job security, and ways of communication between the managers and employees. Quite often, the fear of failure interferes the empowerment process and the lack of trust between the managers and employees does not enable them to give or take up tasks that are challenging and need an extra effort (Bacon, 2006, p. 5).

Yukl and Becker (2006, p. 210) argue that the reasons why management programmes, which aim to increase empowerment, often fail lies in the modest readiness of companies to provide their employees with substantial amount of control and access to management related information. At the same time, trust is considered as an important component of demonstrating the employees that the company values them. In addition, empowerment can support the notion of management trustworthiness, which is an essential element of organizational commitment (Kim et al., 2012, p. 10).

Table 1.3. Obstacles to employee empowerment and was to overcome them

| Obstacles to employee empowerment from manager's perspective | Ways to overcome the obstacles |
|--|---|
| ANXIETY <i>'What if empowering others endangers my position?'</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider 'empowerment' as an extension, not dilution, of authority. • Clarify the responsibilities and job tasks. • Set clear boundaries to avoid violations in terms of ethics, self-respect, insensitive behaviour, responsibility and privacy. |
| DISTRUST <i>'I doubt my employees can do the work well.'</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about and develop employees' capabilities. • Give employees a chance to gain experience of success. • Acknowledge the autonomy of work. |
| POOR COMMUNICATION <i>'It is difficult to delegate when employees do not understand their duties.'</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide by asking questions, not telling what to do. • Ask open-ended questions and listen closely. • Give constructive feedback. |

Source: Adapted from Armache (2013), Bacon (2006) and Ye (2012). Compiled by the author.

However, by following some principles it would be possible to overcome or reduce the barriers to empowerment. Ye (2012, p. 91) has summarised the main obstacles while applying empowerment under anxiety, distrust and poor communication in interpersonal relationships of the staff as well as between the manager and the subordinates. Main obstacles and ways to overcome the hardships are presented on Table 1.3.

When feeling anxiety about one's job security, the managers could mistakenly regard empowerment as losing their control and giving a chance to the subordinates to endanger their position. Instead, empowerment should be seen as an employees' opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities, which leads to personal growth and improved team performance (Armache, 2003). Employees' sense of responsibility is raised through careful determination of the extent of authority that is passed on to the subordinates and clear definition of the goals. Next, managers may have issues with trusting their subordinates by having doubts in their ability to cope with their increased responsibility and new tasks. Here, the managers need to be fully aware of their employees' capabilities to find the right balance in new tasks and responsibilities. Too difficult work would scare the employees and create negative reaction to empowerment. Constant feedback and coaching is essential in raising the specialisation of the staff-members. (Bacon, 2006; Spreizer, 1995; Ye, 2012)

Regarding the amount of autonomy given to the subordinates, the managers need to clearly state the scope of actions that must not harm company value and remind employees to have a strong sense of responsibility while performing in the scope of widened authority. Lastly, the managers often choose to do things themselves instead of relying on others and delegating the tasks to subordinates. Although it can be more time consuming, they should discuss objectives and spend more time to communicate with other employees by having a productive conversation by asking open-ended questions and give positive comments to show the subordinates that their opinions and suggestions have been heard and respected. (Meng & Han, 2014; Kruja et al., 2016) Therefore, clearly stated goals, sufficient amount of information and supportively respectful communication make people prepared to take on responsibility. Moreover,

the employees need to be told what the managers expect from them. Thus, by being aware of the capabilities of every staff member, it is possible to help employees step out from their comfort zone, and provide to their own as well as the business growth. (Namasivayam, 2014)

In today's globalising economy, the organisations become increasingly variable and international regarding their personnel. Often, the staff members belong to different nationalities thus incorporating a wide variety of understandings about the values, job specifics and expectations. Accordingly, in multinational organisations attaining well-performing teamwork and cooperation-focused staff can feature as a challenge for the managers who need to form effective and well-functioning teams from the people with different cultural backgrounds and value systems. (Sparrow et al., 2004) Hence, motivating the employees and empowering them to work skilfully and efficiently would be perceived differently while depending on employees' cultural background they can have different perception and response to work empowerment.

Exploring cross-cultural differences in implications of empowerment along the power distance dimension is one way of reasoning how employee management would perform differently regarding the people of high and low power distance cultures (Eylon & Au, 1999; Koc, 2013; Mead, 2005; Zhang & Begley, 2011). To illustrate the idea, Eylon and Au (1999) have shown through their study findings that managerial behaviour with a positive impact in the United States has not achieved the same results in Hong Kong. Besides the differences in responding to the managerial styles, there are also differences in the prevalence of managerial styles throughout different countries. For example, while Asians tend to use and follow authoritative management style (Koc, 2013), Americans prefer to practice consultative management (Kruja et al., 2016).

In summary, while applying empowering managerial techniques in multi-cultural work-environments, the people from higher power distance cultures (e.g. Asian countries) may have difficulties in accepting the shared power and make decisions that overcome their direct scope of activities at work site. Hence, while managing the personnel and

work environments with noticeable cultural differences, it should be taken into consideration that interactions are more prone to miscommunication due to mitigated responses and bigger distance in the relationship between the manager and the subordinates. After elaborating on theoretical background of the concept of empowerment and considering the possible risks and hindrances while applying different approaches of empowering management strategies, the next subchapter focuses on implementing empowering principles in hospitality and spa industry.

1.3. Implementing empowerment in hospitality and spa industry

Increased welfare in the society leads to the growing need for services for those who search for experiences that capture the mind, body and spirit and, as a result of increased workload, seek to release work stress and find tranquillity. Thus, the people are progressively driven towards services that provide them escape from everyday duties and promise unique experiences by reaching inner balance and optimal wellbeing. Alongside with the demand, the supply in hospitality and namely in spa industry has been growing intensely during the last years (Global Spa and Wellness Summit, 2014; International Spa Association, 2015).

Progressively, beauty salons are turned into day spas, and hotel owners have an increasing need to provide spa and wellness services while the customers consider a spa or a wellness centre as an ordinary and expected part of the hotels (D'Angelo, 2006). Such health, beauty and wellness movement challenges the spa managers with a constant need to satisfy the needs of knowledgeable clientele as well as gain profitability among a variety of service providers. Accordingly, it affects the human resources of the spa businesses that have been increasingly characterised by flatter organisational structures, shorter time-span while delivering services to the customers, higher turnover rates in search for higher profit and new experience (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2013, p. 4).

Hospitality activities are often described through service providers offering 'a contemporaneous human exchange, which is voluntarily entered into, and designed to

enhance the mutual well-being' (Lashley & Morrison, 2011, p. 16). In hospitality industry, company's success is seen significantly dependent on its front-line employees, the company representatives who most often meet the customers (Meng & Han, 2014). Acting in a welcoming manner involves the employees who are expected to be ready to meet customer's expectations throughout all the service and be able to 'cope with psychological pressure that would result from constant smiling and avoiding actions to respond to customer's possibly provocative behaviour' (Mann, 2002; 2004). Thus, by showing sincere appreciation towards the subordinates' work contribution, the managers can positively affect employee's emotional well-being that directly affects their level of sincerity and warmth while delivering hospitality services (Lashley & Morrison, 2011, pp. 257–259).

Here, alongside with the wide scope and personal approach of services offered to the customers, many studies have stressed the importance of empowerment in hospitality management (Bielanski et al., 2011; Kruja et al. 2016; Meng & Han, 2014; Shahril et al., 2013). In spa and wellness industry, spa-therapists who are in a direct contact with the customer during the treatment, have a crucial role in providing the customer with a unique and memorable experience that helps them to reach mental and physical harmony (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008; Smith & Puczkó, 2014).

Moreover, since the end of 1990s, when Joseph Pine and James Gilmore (1999) first described the concept of experience economy, there has been a strong emphasis not only on high quality but also on the importance of creating experiences through the services. Together with aiming at experience-like services, spas are increasingly adapting the concept of wellness into their business models to support the holistic customer experience and satisfaction (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008). Accordingly, the presence of knowledgeable and experience-prone clientele puts high expectations on the spa therapists' work performance.

While delivering spa treatments, the therapists are in close contact with the client usually from 25 to 90 minutes, depending on the type of treatment. Throughout this

time, their emotional state plays noticeable role on personal interaction with customers as well as in their physical performance. (D'Angelo, 2006) Accordingly, maintaining emotionally stable and enthusiastic state of mind is essential for performing well at work performance. Business psychologist Sandi Mann (2002, 2004) has described through her research that employees who are involved in so-called people-work are often prone to high pressure of conveying customer-friendly and caring emotions even if they genuinely feel differently. Allegedly, about half of the time spent at work involves managing one's emotions, whether trying to deliver expected emotions or suppressing inappropriate ones.

To prevent from losing the customers by making them choose competitive spa services due to the therapists' emotional disengagement or to be able to support the customers in their quest for tranquillity and distress, as is often the aim of spa-goers, the employees need to be enthusiastic, compassionate and satisfied with their own job. Moreover, while being empowered professionally and psychologically they can reach emotional harmony which conveys through their work also to the customers (Lashley, 2001, p. 175).

As described by Mann (2002), in delivering hospitality services, employees are often expected to perform according to the rules of 'Have a Nice Day culture', where the employees are required to smile and deliver certain polite phrases with customers to meet social expectations. Emotionally empowered employees, at the same time, would be genuinely motivated and able to create and hold mutually trusting contact with clients, thus being able to provide personalised high-quality services. As stated by Bacon (2006, p. 59), smile can be considered 'one of the strongest, most powerful nonverbal connections you can make with anyone'. Thus, a smile upon greeting, as well as while introducing and delivering the services, convey friendly disposition and enable smoother conversation with customers and with colleagues.

Table 1.4 summarises three work situations, which need different amount of effort from the employee to make the appropriate emotional display expected at their work (Mann,

2002). Emotionally empowered employees would mostly operate within the limits of emotional harmony, thus being able to care genuinely for their customers. In addition, they are less exposed to work stress as their real emotions match with those that are displayed and expected from their role (Lashley, 2001, p. 182).

Table 1.4. Emotional harmony, dissonance and deviance at work

| | Emotional harmony Displayed emotion is the same as felt emotion and expected emotion | Emotional dissonance Displayed emotion is the same as the expected emotion but different from the felt emotion | Emotional deviance Displayed emotion is the same as felt emotion but different from expected emotion |
|---|--|--|--|
| Emotion actually displayed | Happy | Happy | Unhappy |
| Emotion really felt | Happy | Unhappy | Unhappy |
| Emotion expected by company or society | Happy | Happy | Happy |

Source: Mann, 2002, p. 150.

Spa therapists who work in a direct contact with the customers by using touch to treat their skin and muscles during the treatments are directly exposed to misunderstandings and challenging situations. In addition, spa therapists talk to the customers on an array of topics – ask about their health conditions and the expected results of the treatment, advice clients on their personal wellbeing and about the products and services that would best help reaching expected results on any health issues. Due to a close interpersonal contact and communication, spa therapists may be exposed to possible misunderstandings and, hence, to the situations that need quick response and solutions.

To act professionally and promptly in such situations, alongside with emotional well-being, employees must be competent, motivated, and satisfied with their work. (Bielanski et al., 2011; Kapiki, 2012) For that, a spa professional should have autonomy, eagerness and skills to solve possible issues quickly and professionally on-site. (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008; Smith & Puczkó, 2014) Thus, acknowledging the role of

physically and mentally empowered spa employee is essential in providing high-quality experience-like services that would benefit for the customers' holistic treatment.

Thus, while managing the spa and wellness businesses, every endeavour needs to be taken to increase the competence and mental well-being of service providers. Here, employee empowerment would function as a 'critical success factor affecting the operations of service organizations [...] especially in the hospitality industry'. (Kruja et al., 2016, p. 26) Accordingly, the systematically applied empowerment principles would be useful to increase employee motivation, and enhance their problem-solving and decision-making skills to reach optimum well-being of the customers and job satisfaction of the spa staff.

Such fields as relationships between the staff members, reward and recognition, enhancement of professional skills (e.g. participating in training courses) and delivering feedback are traditionally considered as the roles of a human resource specialist (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2013, p. 15). However, characteristically to the spa work environment where the spa staff often consists of the manager and the spa therapists who deliver body/ face treatments, the job tasks of human resource specialist are often conveyed by the spa manager. Accordingly, managers should aim at engaging their employees to work enthusiastically by encouraging them to share their thoughts and opinions.

As McLain and Krieger (2013) showed by their study of a global hospitality chain, enhancing employees' self-efficacy and creating stronger bonds with organisation does not result solely from conducting surveys or reading reports on employees' job satisfaction. Instead, encouraging the staff members to share their experiences, thoughts and opinions would lead to higher commitment and feeling of empowerment. 'Sharing how they have created a superior customer experience and how that experience could be replicated for other customers, or discussing anything else that's on their minds, could improve the team's engagement and performance' (*Ibid.*, p. 6).

Table 1.5 presents a list of topics that should be covered in an employee manual to empower the spa-therapists with information essential for high-level service provision

and personal well-being at work-site. To enable spa therapists to act competently and with confidence in all work situations, they should be provided with a clear notion about their rights and responsibilities, details on company policies, expectations for assisting colleagues, possible benefits or bonuses, and other important information affecting their daily job performance.

Table 1.5. Employee manual for spa businesses

| | |
|--|--|
| A mission statement, company values and goals | Leave of absence; sick leave |
| Absences and late arrivals | Lunch and break times |
| Benefits (e.g. bonuses, employee discounts on services and products, continuing education) | Opportunity for career advancement |
| Client records | Organisational hierarchy |
| Confidentiality | Overtime |
| Definition of full- and part-time employees | Paid and unpaid holidays |
| Disciplinary action | Performance evaluations |
| Dress code | Professional conduct |
| Emergency procedures | Safety standards |
| Employee grievances | Sick leave; request for time-off |
| Employee notices; communication | Substance abuse |
| Family leave | Training process; incentive programmes |
| Gratuity reports | Trial evaluation periods |
| Harrasment policy | Vacation time |
| Health insurance | Work schedules |
| Hiring and selection process | Worker's compensation |

Source: D'Angelo, 2006, p. 342.

Daily work processes related to the treatment procedures are usually specified in the operational manual. Accordingly, information that is incorporated in employee and operational manuals state clearly the operational and managerial strategies in spa work environment and would be accessible to the employees at any point of time to enable him or her to work competently and with high self-confidence. (D'Angelo, 2006) Thus, based on the manuals and quality standards, the employees can keep themselves up-dated on company policies and generally acceptable code of conduct that would enable employees to operate professionally within the limits of the rights and responsibilities.

In summary, the first part of the thesis provided a theoretical framework of employee empowerment based on the thematic literature review and the results of the previous studies. Firstly, the concept was discussed through historical perspective, showing how the notion of empowerment started to emerge to the psychology and management-related literature and research. Next, moving on from discussing the essence and different approaches to empowerment, the focus was laid on possible risk areas of empowerment by involving the issue of trust, manager's own job security, and challenges on the way of communication between the managers and subordinates.

As the goal of the present master thesis is to provide recommendations for implementing employee empowerment in spa business setting, the literature review contained an extra part about the implementation of empowerment in hospitality and spa industry. Accordingly, the specifics of spa-therapists' daily work environment proved to involve higher exposure to misunderstandings and challenging situations due to close communication and direct contact with the customers during the treatments. Thus, knowledgeable application of empowerment principles by spa managers would support employees' self-confidence, and increase their satisfaction with their present job. However, as seen from the critical literature review, thematic research on employee empowerment in spa and wellness business settings has been rather limited (Bielanski et al., 2011; Kruja et al. 2016). To contribute to the research in the field of spa industry, the current master thesis was compiled to study the implications of empowerment in the spa context involving spa employees to find out how knowledgeable application of employee empowerment principles would affect employee motivation and job satisfaction and lead to higher customer satisfaction and productivity.

The literature findings will be further applied for the preparation of the research and discussion of the study results. The themes that were considered relevant by the scholars in empowerment studies were retrieved from the literature to be applied in the present research as a basis for to the interviews, survey questionnaires, and coding scheme for the content analysis. The following chapter introduces the empirical part of the thesis – a comparative case study on employee empowerment in Italian spa businesses.

2. COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ON EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT IN ITALIAN SPA BUSINESSES

2.1. Research strategy and data collection practicalities

The present research was prepared and conducted to meet the goal of the master thesis for providing the spa managers with the proposals for implementing employee empowerment principles in a spa business setting. The research aimed at finding answers to the research questions about 1) How do the spa managers acknowledge and apply the principles of employee empowerment in their spa business setting, and 2) what are the spa-therapists' expectations and actual perceptions on employee empowerment in their work environment. The present chapter describes the methodology of data collection, and presents its relevance to the research. Firstly, the chapter presents an overview of spa businesses involved in the study. Secondly, the focus is laid upon the research strategy and data collection practicalities of the comparative case studies delivered through semi-structured interviews with spa managers and survey questionnaires replied by the spa-therapists. The chapter concludes with the data analysis and presentation of the study results.

As acknowledged by Beeton (2005, p. 37), 'tourism research, as psychologically complex field, is prone to multiple interpretations due to its multifaceted relationships and interactions'. Thus, as many other tourism-related topics, the present research is studied from the multidisciplinary approaches common to social sciences, which are considered as 'disciplines helping to understand the processes and patterns of human behaviour and their relation to the society' (Holden, 2006, p. 3). Accordingly, as also seen from the studies of Botterill and Platenkamp (2012, p. 21) and Beeton (2005, p. 17) the use of mixed method case study as a research method is extensive in tourism research and has proved to feature as a well-grounded choice also in case of the research on employee empowerment in spa business setting. Thus, to get a better understanding

of the research question stated in the present work, comparative case study strategy with mixed methods has been chosen to implement the research while this type of research has been considered to give a broader picture of the research object rather than qualitative or quantitative method alone (Bernard, 2011; Bryman, 2006).

After formulating the concepts and variables, a research design – a form of carefully developed plan to conduct the research (Ritchie & Goeldner, 1994, p. 97) was created to reach the stated goals and meet the relevance of the procedures. In the present research, a descriptive design in the form of case studies was used to discover relations and interactions among presented variables of spa employees' expectations and actual perceptions on implications of employee empowerment in their organisation. Although case study enables the usage of multiple data-collection methods, thus being a useful source of information about and for the organisation involved in the study, they are often 'time-consuming, have the results with limited generalizability, and may possibly be affected by individual prejudice' (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Acknowledging the limitations, the current research follows a comparative case study approach with mixed research methods applied through interviews and written questionnaires for studying employee empowerment in three spa businesses.

The following presents an overview of the involved business settings. The present research was conducted in three Italian spa businesses. Thus, the sample – a group of people that is chosen out from a larger number of people and is asked questions in order to get information about larger group of people (Kothari, 2013, p. 27) – was formed by the spa managers and spa therapists who deliver massage and body/ face treatments in respective organisations. Depending on the organisation, the employees who deliver massage and body/ face treatments were called differently, e.g. massage therapists, spa therapists, or aestheticians. In the sample of the present research all of them were referred to as spa therapists.

The business environments involved the hotels with separately managed spa and wellness facilities in the Mediterranean, Alpine and capital area in Italy (hereinafter

referred to as Spa A, Spa B, and Spa C; see Table 2.1). For clearer understanding of the work environments chosen for the present study, the following spa definition by International Spa Association (2015) was used: ‘A place of business that enhances the overall well-being of a person through a variety of professional spa services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit. A business must offer at least two of the following three services: massage (full body); skin care treatments (i.e. facials); or body treatments (i.e. hydrotherapy or body wraps/scrubs)’.

Table 2.1. Overview of the spa business settings involved in the research

| | SPA A | SPA B | SPA C |
|-----------------------------|---|---|--|
| Location | Coastal resort by the Mediterranean Sea, 270 km from Milano | Mountain resort in Alpine area, 90 km from Milano | Capital area of Italy, outskirts of Milano |
| Type | Wellness Centre in a 5-star family hotel | Alpine Spa in a 4-star family hotel | City Spa in a 4-star family hotel |
| Main Customer Groups | 60% Italians, 30% French, 20% Russians; in-house and outside customers | 90% Italians, 10% Germans; in-house and outside customers | 50% Italians, 15% French, 15% Germans; in-house and outside customers |
| Staff | Spa manager, 1 head-therapist, 2 spa therapists | Spa manager, 1 head-therapist, 4 spa therapists | Spa manager, 1 head-therapist, 4 spa therapists |
| Spa facilities | Relaxation area with 18 chaise lounges; Jacuzzi; whirlpool; sauna; Turkish bath | Relaxation area with 16 chaise lounges; Jacuzzi; whirlpool; out-doors pool; sauna; Turkish bath | Relaxation area with 14 chaise lounges; Jacuzzi; pool; sauna; infrared sauna |
| Treatment rooms | 3 single, 1 for couples | 5 single, 1 for couples | 4 single, 1 for couples |

Source: Oral interviews with spa managers, February–March, 2016 (compiled by the author)

The particular business settings were chosen for their similar organisational structure and high level of services with all spas offering 4–5-star services. The involved spas were located in three different regions, each representing a high-level spa in the corresponding areas of Mediterranean, Alpine and capital region of Italy. Moreover, Italy has featured in the field of spa and wellness services since the ancient Roman

baths (D'Angelo, 2006; Smith & Puczkó, 2014), and is a home of traditional spas according to the classification of wellness products and destinations (Bushell & Sheldon, 2009, p. 74). Accordingly, an Italian spa business setting captured as an intriguing environment for studying the management strategies in today's economically challenging spa business environment; thus forming the basis of the case studies on employee empowerment in the present research.

All spa therapists and managers participated in the study; hence, the sample consisted of 13 spa therapists and three spa managers. The author acknowledges that the size of the sample is small in number thus posing limitations on the generalizability of the study results. At the same time, it is complete and representative regarding all three organisations involved in the study. Thus, the sample can be considered comprehensive in relation to the present business settings and provide a basis for making matter-of-fact conclusions and propositions regarding the field of spa management.

Qualitative and quantitative methods, applied by oral interviews and written study questionnaires, were used in this research under the comparative case study as it has been considered a suitable method for tourism and hospitality researchers dealing with complex phenomena thus showing that solely 'rigorous, scientific methods are not always appropriate for the problems encountered' (Walle, 1997, p. 524). Moreover, to overcome the criticism and limitations of the case study, such as lacking precision and objectivity by using less amount of quantitative data and having a bigger option of researcher bias on interpreting qualitative data, triangulation has been often seen as a useful research method (Beeton, 2005, p. 40).

Hence, as stated by Botterill and Platenkamp, (2012, p. 173), with using mixed methods by combining both quantitative and qualitative method, the study results and conclusions would be less biased by increased reliability (i.e. the questions measure the same thing over time and between respondents) and validity (i.e. the survey measures what it is intended to measure). Accordingly, applying two different methods under the case studies on employee empowerment enabled researcher collecting information from

both counterparts – the managers and the subordinates. The methods were applied via two instruments: qualitative method via oral interviews (see Appendix 1) and quantitative method via written questionnaires (see Appendix 2). Hence, in-depth information was retrieved through face-to-face semi-structured interviews from the spa managers for getting better understanding of the topic in the specific organisation. Written survey questionnaires were used to receive comparable information on spa therapists' expectations and actual perceptions on the implications of empowerment in their work environment.

The study was conveyed in two successive stages. Firstly, the interviews were conducted with the managers from three separate spa businesses with the aim to get in-depth knowledge of the organisation and the manager's personal view on the topic under study. Secondly, spa therapists' expectations and actual experience of employee empowerment at workplace were identified through written questionnaires. The following describes each research instrument in a closer detail.

To retrieve better understanding of the spa managers' perception of empowerment and how (if so) they had actually applied the related principles in their daily job operations, semi-structured interviews were compiled for the research. Interviews with the spa managers were built upon the topics (see Table 2.2) retrieved from the critical literature review that showed relevance to the essence of empowerment and the results of the previous studies done in the field (Armache, 2013; Covey & Merrill, 2006; Eylon & Au, 1999; Lashley, 1995; Morreale & Schockley-Zalabak, 2014; Koc, 2013; Meng & Han, 2014; Spreitzer, 1995). Based on the topics, the questions were combined to form a guide to the interviewer to receive reliable and comparable qualitative data. The interview questions (see Appendix 1) aimed at answering the research questions with targeting the main goal of the research – to give recommendations on implementation of employee empowerment in a spa business setting. Open-ended questions were chosen to allow the interviewee to elaborate on relevant topics and help to understand the topic in wider perspective.

Table 2.2. A basis for studying the research question number 1 about spa managers' awareness and application of empowerment principles in their spa business setting

| Aspects of empowerment | Topics covered in the interviews with the spa managers |
|--|--|
| Concept of empowerment | Empowerment as a set of principles for increasing employee motivation, job satisfaction and productivity in their spa business; The ways of applying empowerment-related principles or techniques. |
| Values and goals | Acknowledging organisational values and goals; The ways of introducing the company's value system to the staff. |
| Motivation and job satisfaction | Employees' level of motivation and job satisfaction; The ways of motivating employees to work more effectively and enthusiastically. |
| Communication, information, rights and responsibilities | Communication between colleagues, and with the management; Conflict management; Organising work meetings and free-time events for the staff; Information exchange in the organisation; Effects of cultural background on one's job performance and interpersonal relationships; Rights and code of conduct of employees; The ways of introducing the rights and job duties to the staff; Usage of and access to the manuals/ quality-standards. |
| Involvement and Participation | Involvement of employees in spa management, service design and product development; The ways of cooperation (e.g. teamwork, individual input). |
| Training and Skills | The level of proficiency of the staff members; Training courses to increase employees' proficiency (e.g. massage techniques, language skills); Career advancement opportunities. |
| Feedback | The ways of reflecting upon employees' job performance; Individual feedback and staff-meetings; Feedback from the staff-members. |

Sources: Armache, 2013; Covey & Merrill, 2006; Eylon & Au, 1999; Koc, 2013; Lashley, 1995; Meng & Han, 2014; Morreale & Schockley-Zalabak, 2014; Spreitzer, 1995. Compiled by the author.

For studying the topic, face-to-face interviews were chosen and conducted on-site in each spa business setting. Semi-structured interviews were preferred in this research for investigating the topic because there might not have been other chance to repeat the interview under same circumstances and, thus, it was an effective way to receive as much information as possible in a structured and comparable way (Bernard, 2011;

James & Busher, 2012). The themes were initiated with one focus question and then developed with the sub-questions. Extra stated questions, called probes (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008, pp. 114–115), were prepared to initiate deeper investigation of the topic and to be used if the interviewee needed to be helped to get back to track or proceed with the ideas more openly.

While the first part of the research involved spa managers, the second part of the research was conducted with spa therapists. To answer the research question number 2 on employees' expectations towards employee empowerment in their organisation and their actual experience on empowerment at worksite, a written survey questionnaire was used as a research strategy. Hence, quantitative research method was employed in this study through written questionnaires that allowed collecting information from a wider sample that can be reached by interviewing individuals (Burgess, 2001; Kothari, 2003).

The idea to use quantitative method in the present research was supported by the notion that a survey questionnaire was the most frequently employed method in the studies described in the literature review on employee empowerment (Armache, 2013; Koc, 2013; Lashley, 1995; Meng & Han, 2014; Spreitzer, 1995). By using a written questionnaire as an instrument, the author conveyed quantitative research to find out the expectations of the spa therapists' in relation to their involvement in daily work and management processes, including information exchange, participation in trainings, motivation and job satisfaction, decision-making and problem solving.

The basis of the questionnaire (see Table 2.3) was formed according to the findings from the relevant literature and previous study results. Similarly to the interview questions, the questionnaires were built upon several research findings, mostly by Armache (2013, p. 26) on the benefits of employees' empowerment and the survey items from Meng and Han's theoretical construct on empowerment (2014, pp. 236–237). Besides that, additional material retrieved through the interviews with spa managers was incorporated in the formation of study questions such as the importance of trust, interpersonal relationships and acknowledgment of one's rights and

responsibilities which importance had been pointed out by many researchers (Covey & Merrill, 2006; Morreale & Schockley-Zalabak, 2014; Spreizer, 1995).

Table 2.3. A basis for studying the research question number 2 on spa-therapists' expectations and actual perception of empowerment-related aspects on their work-site

| Aspects of empowerment | Employee expectations on empowerment | Actual perception of empowerment on the worksite |
|--|---|--|
| Values and goals | Knowing the values and goals of the company is important for everybody to work well. | I know the values and goals of the company very well. |
| Motivation and job satisfaction | Well-motivated employees are more satisfied with their job. | I am satisfied with my present job. |
| Training and skills | Practical skills and competences are important for working well. | I can participate free of charge in the training courses to improve my skills. |
| Rights and responsibilities | Employees must know their job duties and responsibilities very well. | I know my rights and code of conduct as a spa therapist very well. |
| Communication | Positive atmosphere among all the staff members is essential for working well. | I can talk with my manager about everything that affects my job performance. |
| Information exchange | Each employee must have access to the information needed to provide proper service. | I have enough information for solving the problems and making decisions on my own. |
| Cultural background | Cultural differences of the staff members do not influence work performance. | I communicate the same way with all my colleagues no matter what is their nationality. |
| Employee involvement and participation | Managers should involve spa therapists in spa management (e.g. discussing customer service and/or product development). | I take part in discussions about new treatments, products, and customer-related questions. |
| Feedback | Managers should often give and ask feedback from spa therapists. | I often talk about my job performance with my manager. |
| Trust | Mutual trust between all staff members is very important for working well. | My manager is confident in me. |

Sources: Armache, 2013; Covey & Merrill, 2006; Eylon & Au, 1999; Koc, 2013; Lashley, 1995; Meng & Han, 2014; Morreale & Schockley-Zalabak, 2014; Spreitzer, 1995. Compiled by the author.

Although the number of subsections is somewhat bigger than in the outline used for the interviews, the basis of questionnaires covered the same topics discussed with the

spa managers. Three more sections were added for capturing the subtleties under the topics related to the values and communication. Accordingly, the specified sections were the following: communication, information exchange, cultural background, and trust.

As commonly used in social sciences, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the presented statements on a Likert scale (Burgess, 2001), which enabled the respondents to give rated responses on their expectations and experiences of empowerment in their spa business setting. The scale ranged from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'). The respondents had also the sixth option– not to reply by choosing the answer N/A ('not applicable').

The study questionnaire was built upon three parts (see Appendix 2). Part 1 outlined 20 statements that were based on 10 topics (see Table 2.3) to measure the perceptions and expectations of the spa therapists towards employee empowerment. The second part of the questionnaire was formed to study spa therapists' perception on the motivators that make them work efficiently and enthusiastically. The respondents were asked to note down what motivated them at present and what would motivate them if the given options would have been available. The third part of the questionnaire was formed to provide background information – the length of spa therapists' work experience, and their nationality.

After preparing the basis for interviews and questionnaires, and before doing the main survey, a pilot study was compiled within one of the spa businesses. The aim was to check the applicability of the prepared research instruments to measure what they are expected to measure. With the pilot study, the interview questions and the written survey questionnaire were tested to find out possible limitations of the research instruments (Burgess, 2001). The pilot study was delivered in one of the spa business settings and among all the staff members working in the spa, i.e. a spa manager and three spa therapists. The following summarises the course of the pilot study and

presents the modifications that were applied to the research instruments for delivering the main study.

The pilot study was started with the face-to-face interview with the spa manager to get a deeper insight into the business operations and understand the spa manager's views on the application of empowerment principles in the organisation. During the interview, considerable amount of time was spent on explaining and defining the essence of empowerment and its practical implications in actual business setting in the beginning of the interview. As follows, in the main study, the other aspects of empowerment were discussed first (see Table 2.2) and more time was taken to define the concept of empowerment and find an Italian counterpart to the corresponding concept in Italian spa business context in the last part of the interview.

Secondly, initially planned time-span for the interviews was increased in the main study reaching from the firstly stated one hour to two hours. The reasons for longer time were somewhat related to language issues as the interviews were conducted in English which was neither the respondent's nor the interviewer's mother tongue. Though both were quite fluent in English, the ideas were explained and illustrated in many ways to avoid any miscommunication and distress that would result from hasty questioning. In addition, to capture a full understanding of the topic, the interview contained many illustrative descriptions thus increasing the length of the interview.

After the interview with spa managers, the spa-therapists were asked to fill in the questionnaires. As the questionnaires were in English, there was a chance of miscommunication as all the spa-therapists were Italians. To diminish the extent of miscommunication due to the use of the language that is not the respondents' mother tongue, the case studies captured high-end four- and five-star hotels where the local staff was expected to be fluent in English. The results of the pilot study showed that the statements about cultural differences might have been confusing. Thus, those statements were rephrased for the main study. In addition, to increase the reliability of the study results, the researcher introduced the questionnaire individually to each

head-therapist who, in turn, agreed to advise other therapists if any technical questions would arise.

Another revision of the survey for the main study was related to the motivators in Part 2. The pilot version did not convey clearly the spa therapists' expectations on motivators, thus another column was added next to the 'present motivators' to let the respondents point out what would motivate them to work well if anything could be possible. As the respondents preferred to reply to the questionnaire on the paper format, the questionnaires for the main study were printed out and handed over on paper. The filled-in questionnaires were scanned and sent via e-mail to the researcher.

The main survey was conducted from February to March, 2016. Firstly, face-to-face interviews were conveyed with the managers in their actual business settings, i.e. Spa A, Spa B and Spa C. Based on the mutual agreement between the spa managers and the researcher, the interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards. Secondly, the questionnaires were distributed to the spa therapists in person on-site in the beginning of March, then filled in by the spa therapists on paper, scanned and sent to the researcher via e-mail. Considering the limitations of the employees to participate in the research (incl. work in shifts, being on a vacation in the given period), the timeframe for filling in and returning the questionnaires was one month. The following chapter contains an overview of the data analysis and study results based on the data retrieved from the interviews and the questionnaires.

2.2. Data analysis and study results

The following chapter gives an overview of data analysis and study results of the research done for answering the research questions on implications of employee empowerment in an Italian spa business settings. The research was delivered via mixed-method case study approach by using face-to-face semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires as research instruments to answer the following research questions: 1) How well are the spa managers aware and how they apply the ways of empowerment for enhancing the service quality in their business setting?, and 2) What

are the employees' expectations and actual perceptions of employee empowerment in their organisation?

To analyse a big amount of textual data retrieved through semi-structured interviews with spa managers, qualitative content analysis was chosen as it allowed to recognize deeper meanings in the textual data and classify them into meaningful categories by coding and theming the coded chunks of texts to form solid basis for comparison between the interviewees (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004; Shah & Corley, 2006). Content analysis was done on three interviews to find out the managers' views on empowerment in their company and how, if so, they implemented the strategy to apply the empowerment-related principles.

To point at the chunks of data (i.e. the text) that represented the same phenomenon, coding was used throughout the text. After detecting the parts of text that had the meaning in relation to the research question, the relevant pieces of text were labelled by codes which is a 'word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data' (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). Next, the meaningful parts were linked and joined under themes that corresponded to the aspects of empowerment retrieved from the critical literature review. The themes and corresponding codes are presented in Table 2.4.

Accordingly, deductive approach was used to deliver cross-case analysis of interviews where the categorisation was based on the theoretical framework of empowerment and previous research done in the field (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Such analyses allowed describing the connections between each spa manager's views on empowerment-related implications in their organisation and detecting possible patterns in their views and about the awareness of their employees' expectations and actual perception on empowerment. On the basis of the formed themes, three interviews were compared and interpreted to answer the research questions on spa managers' awareness and the ways of application of empowerment for enhancing the service quality in their business setting.

Table 2.4. Coding scheme for the content analysis of the interviews with spa managers

| Themes | Codes |
|--|---|
| Concept of empowerment | View on empowerment; managerial principles in daily operations; linguistic challenges about the concept. |
| Values and goals | Personal values; cultural values; organisational values; individualism; team-work; ethics; trust; company's goals. |
| Motivation and job satisfaction | Motivators; motivated employee; job satisfaction; turnover; enthusiasm; career advancement; personal achievement; appreciation; rewards; 'no money for having fun'; relationships. |
| Communication, information, rights and responsibilities | Information exchange; job tasks; rights; responsibility; communication; manuals; code of conduct; quality-standards; relationships with colleagues; relationship with the boss; deal with complaints; problem-solving; offer solutions on-site; decision-making; 'friendly chat'. |
| Involvement and participation | Teamwork; cooperation; represent the team at meetings; ask advice on products/ treatments. |
| Training and skills | Massage; languages; management courses; training system; staff proficiency; career opportunities; desire of career advancement; traineeship; personal experience. |
| Feedback | Give feedback; ask feedback; show appreciation; team-meetings on feedback; individual feedback. |

Source: Armache, 2013; Covey & Merrill, 2006; Eylon & Au, 1999; Koc, 2013; Lashley, 1995; Meng & Han, 2014; Morreale & Schockley-Zalabak, 2014; Spreitzer, 1995. Compiled by the author.

To have a concise overview of the spa managers' views on empowerment-related aspects in their daily managerial activities, the study results were presented in an easily comprehensible and comparable way in a table format (see Appendix 3). To relate the managers to their actual business setting, they were marked as Manager A, B, and C, correspondingly referring to Spa A, Spa B, and Spa C. The same system was used throughout the table as well as the textual summary of the study results.

The following part of the work elaborates on the study results that were most informative in the light of the critical literature review for reaching the main goal of the work – for providing recommendations for implementing employee empowerment principles in a spa business setting. The discussion of the study results in relation to the

information retrieved from the other counterpart – the spa therapists, and critical literature review, is presented in Chapter 3.

In the beginning of the interviews, each manager talked about their career path and introduced their spa business setting (see Table 2.1). All spa businesses had similar organisational structures. While being a part of a hotel business setting, each spa manager was a direct subordinate to a general manager of the hotel, and worked in cooperation with the human resource manager and the accounting department. Thus, the staff of each spa business setting consisted of a manager, and up to five spa therapists who were the spa manager's direct subordinates. All spa settings were run by male managers, while all the spa therapists were female. Regarding the cultural background of the staff members, all employees were Italians.

Regarding the work experience, all spa managers had been working in the present position for more than five years and before that, about five to ten years in the hospitality industry. Two managers shared the similar educational background by having degrees in business and managerial studies accompanied by few-months-long courses on delivering spa services. Manager B had gained knowledge about hospitality industry through working with his parents who had been always involved with the hotel business. In addition, he had done traineeship in other hotels and learnt independently (e.g. participate in conferences, be an active member in international spa organisations).

While talking about the concept of empowerment, this notion did not feature in the active vocabulary of the spa managers. Thus, the research topic was firstly conveyed alongside the different aspects of empowerment (see Table 2.2); the concept itself was discussed in the last part of the interview. Accordingly, the following presents the study results on the following topics: organisational and individual values and goals; motivation and job satisfaction; communication, information exchange, rights and responsibilities; employee involvement; training and skills; and feedback.

The discussion about the organisational and individual values revealed managers' different opinions about the importance of discussing the goals and values of the

company with their subordinates. Namely, though all the managers said they shared the same values with the company there was much hesitance about trying to rephrase the ideas behind the word 'values'. The values that were shared by all managers were related to high work ethics, trust and team-work; the main goals of the company were high customer satisfaction and productivity. There were three ways of introducing the company's values to the employees. In case of Spa A, after the new employees were recruited, they participated in a meeting where the general manager and the human resource manager introduced them the company's values and goals. After that, there had been no subsequent discussions on this topic.

According to Manager A, all his employees knew and shared the same values with the company, which was to treat the customers well and aim at high productivity. Manager B considered the topic of values his personal concern, regarding it very important that the employees not only knew the organisational goals and values but also shared them. After recruiting new employees, the spa manager himself discussed their work goals and values with the newcomers. Manager C stated that the values were presented in the employee manual and everyone could read it. He considered team-work and high work-ethics of big importance in relation to the skilful staff but could not say how well the spa therapists shared the values and whether or not it would be important in relation to reaching the general outcomes of high customer satisfaction and increased productivity.

While discussing the topic about employee motivation and job satisfaction, the most covered aspects were related to high turnover rate, monetary bonuses and interpersonal relationships. Managers A and B stressed the idea that positive work atmosphere was important for working enthusiastically and tried to inspire their subordinates by being good role-models, at the same time hoping that inspiration worked better than monetary bonuses. However, all managers offered the spa therapists a possibility to buy spa products with reduced prices and in Spa A the employees had also discounts on using spa treatments. At the same time, the use of public areas in the spa facilities (e.g. pool, saunas, and relaxation area) was not allowed to any employees for leisure purposes. Managers A and B considered it also important that employees had reduced price for

meals on the property. Differently from other managers, Manager B considered the availability of free training courses as a big motivator to the employees to enhance their proficiency whether in relation to their practical skills about massage techniques or acquiring fluency in foreign languages. In addition, he considered interesting work tasks (e.g. involving employees in the process of product development) another way to motivate the employees. All managers pointed unanimously at the high turnover rate among spa therapists, while having few team members with more than five-year experience, others were likely to leave the job after few years.

Regarding interpersonal communication and information exchange, Managers A and B considered open mind and friendliness essential for mutually satisfying communication and while offering high-quality services. In addition, they preferred talking to their employees individually, and as often as possible or needed. Manager C preferred communication via e-mails as he felt that it is not appropriate to chat with the employees as there were often the clients in the same room. In case there were topics that could not be covered via e-mails, he summoned monthly staff meetings.

In relation to one's rights and responsibilities, in each spa, the work goals and job tasks were covered in employee manuals. Managers A and C believed that employees had read these materials carefully, as they delivered services properly. Manager B took it as his personal responsibility to discuss the work goals, job tasks, rules and rights with all the spa therapists. He stated that before asking people to follow the rules, they must understand and respect these rules.

All managers brought out the particularity of the hospitality service provision in the spa business setting. Accordingly, as the spas were situated in the same facilities with the hotels, the stay in the establishment involved at least one over-night stay with minimum one spa-visit that was usually a stay in the sauna and pool area for a few hours. Quite often, the customers came again to receive a beauty or massage treatment. Accordingly, a longer stay within the same business environment gave an opportunity to turn each spa-visit into memorable experience. Moreover, in case of any issues in service

delivery, for example misconducted treatment or a negative experience from the client's personal viewpoint, the spa therapists had time to offer solutions on-site, which would ameliorate any shortcomings or mishaps in general service provision (e.g. offering a present upon departure, an extra spa-visit or another treatment on the following day).

The statements from the managers to illustrate the importance of cooperation and reacting properly in challenging situations were the following: 'We do not have problems, only solutions'; 'What matters is that when a guest tells you that you have made a mistake, we all together work to optimize the situation'; 'We work together to make the best solution; so that instead of having a bad memory of the spa visit the guest can remember the part following the mishap and say in check-out – the staff took fabulous care of me'. For making decisions and solving the problems, the employees' used to turn to their managers in Spa A and Spa C. Manager B, instead, assumed that his subordinates had sufficient knowledge and authority to act individually in problematic situations and offer solutions according to the mutually accepted rules and within the limits of their responsibilities.

Talking about the importance of employees' cultural background in relation to communication and work performance, the managers lacked experience as they had been mostly working only with Italians. Manager B, however, had shortly worked in a multinational team and revealed some difficulties while finding mutual understanding related to work ethics and mutually accepted means of communication (e.g. talk to the employees individually or summon staff meetings; talk about the problems directly or use mitigated speech).

Regarding the topics of employee involvement and participation, all the managers said that they involved the spa therapists in the discussions about treatments and products in case they wanted to have an overview of the customer feedback after the treatments or renew the spa menu. In relation to the product development, they preferred to consult with the therapists with longer work experience as they probably had more knowledge in the field. Manager B said, 'I ask them to brainstorm on new treatments and how to

offer them attractively'. However, Manager A said that statistics on the use of treatments and sale of products (e.g. cream, oil, scented candles) was quite informative, thus diminishing the need to consult employees in related aspects. Manager C was considering involving the head-therapist into his managerial activities (e.g. calculating the monthly productivity). Regarding the employees team-work skills, all the managers considered it important to be able to work together towards one goal. At the same time, Manager A and C considered spa therapists' work-style individual; thus, team-work skills were seen as a bonus for supporting information exchange between the employees and, thus, provide them with wider knowledge for advising clients about treatments offered by other therapists.

Regarding spa therapists' professional skills and training possibilities, all the managers brought out the importance of highly skilled professionals in the team. However, they had different perception of the idea whether they should provide free training courses to the less skilled employees. Besides of proficiency in massage techniques, all the managers pointed at the need for improving employees' language skills. In case of Spa A and Spa C, the company could not cover the training expenses. However, in Spa C the employees' pursuit for self-development was supported by allowing them to participate in the courses during the working hours. Managers A and C stressed the importance of proper recruitment process and stated that they try not to hire therapists who lack practical skills, to avoid an extra need for training courses on massage skills. In addition, they both pointed at the lack of financial resources to pay for the employees' language studies – thus the managers expected the employees to have the required level of massage and language skills.

Manager B, on the other hand, provided all his subordinates with a free access to any training courses aiming at reaching the highest level of proficiency. He stated that continuous training and wide knowledge base were essential for being a competent therapist and he considered free training courses on massage techniques and languages an effective motivator and supported each endeavour of the employees to develop their skills. At the same time, he said that the spa therapists left the job after they reached

high level of proficiency. ‘After five or six years they leave this spa and open their own spa [...] I train them [...] and then they leave.’ To act upon this tendency, he tried to vary employees’ work tasks and increase their responsibility outside the treatment room; for example, by involving them in product development and widening their job tasks. In all spas, the variety of job tasks involved working in the reception, as there was no extra person for booking and explaining the treatments to the clients.

While discussing the last aspect of empowerment, feedback, the discussion involved means and frequency of providing feedback on employees’ and managers’ work performance. Managers A and B tried to ask daily if everything was all right, even if the conversation was as short as ‘Is everything OK and under control?’ Besides that, Manager A summoned all staff twice a year to discuss the team’s work performance. Manager B had individual talk with each therapist in the beginning or in the end of the work week about their job performance and whether employees’ had some suggestions to the manager. Manager C did not aim at giving or receiving daily feedback; instead, if any issues came up, he organised a meeting to talk to all the spa staff together.

In the last part of the interview, the discussion was returned to capturing the essence of empowerment, and whether the managers would consider it as an applicable strategy in managing daily work processes. Overall, none of the managers admitted knowledgeable application of empowerment techniques for increasing the service quality in their businesses or affecting employee motivation or their level of job satisfaction. So far, they had dealt with related topics separately, e.g. tried to find out why the spa therapists were not interested in bigger sales numbers, or why they had problems with keeping up the good spirit throughout all workday, or whether they should organise meetings for the whole team or prefer individual approach for giving feedback.

Thus, while talking about certain techniques or principles in employee management, their replies often referred to randomness. Their remarks were stated as follows: ‘I *sometimes* notice that when I say something good to the therapists they come to work with happy face also the next day’; ‘*Once* I asked her [a spa therapist] to replace me on

the board meeting'; *'I think they know the values of the company but we don't speak about such things every day'*. Thinking about all these topics and how it has affected everyday work *has not come to my mind before*. I know about these topics but *I have never thought* to see it as a whole, something that might directly have an effect on individual work'.

Only Manager C had met the concept of empowerment in the thematic literature and heard it in some presentations on management-related events. He explained the word 'empowerment' as follows: 'Basically I think it is about raising employees' motivation, taking care of their job satisfaction, allowing them to make decisions on their own'. Yet, after discussing the essence of empowerment, an idea to use the empowerment-related principles in daily management was greeted unanimously by each manager, as it seemed to be a comprehensive way to look at different aspects that would affect individual work performance, and successively, the productivity of whole business.

Regarding the word for capturing empowerment-related aspects in whole, the managers pointed at the lack of unanimously acceptable noun or verb to convey all the subtleties of 'empowerment' in Italian language. The few options proposed by the managers were '*motivazione*' (Eng. 'motivation'), '*legittimazione*' (Eng. 'validation'), '*trasferimento di poteri*' (Eng. 'transfer of power'), '*rafforzamento*' (Eng. 'reinforcement') '*potenziamento*' (Eng. 'strengthening'). After discussing various possibilities, the managers supported the idea to keep using the English word as otherwise it would be limited to motivation or delegating power which, however, seemed to convey vague or biased meanings.

All the managers showed interest towards the study results on spa therapists' expectations and perception on empowerment in their spas and in spa industry in general. In addition, they considered the questionnaire as a useful tool for spa managers' individual usage whether in oral or written form. Namely, it was considered as a useful tool for initiating discussion with subordinates about discovering and elaborating on the

aspects that they found important in relation to increasing their job satisfaction, employee motivation, involvement and service quality.

The second part of the research involved spa therapists and their perception towards empowerment in their organisation. The written survey questionnaires (see Appendix 2) were used to retrieve information for answering the research question regarding spa therapists' expectations and actual perception of implications of empowerment at their work place. The following presents the study results based on the data retrieved through questionnaires.

The data retrieved through the questionnaires (see Appendix 2, Parts 1–3) was analysed by using Excel 2013 software application by comparing the responses in Part 1 by the mean scores (m) and standard deviations (s). The variation of data was measured by a standard deviation of a sample, while low scores showing that individual responses were close to the mean values, and high standard deviation ($s > 0.5$) referring to bigger differences among the responses along the value range (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 243). Data on employee motivators (Part 2) were analysed by the number of respondents ($n = 13$) and Part 3 provided information on respondents' work experience, type of education and nationality.

The response rate of the written questionnaires was 100%. All of the respondents were female and Italians by their nationality. Regarding the type of education, all therapists had received special training as a spa therapist. All respondents had been working in the spa industry for five or more years, whereas the length of the work-experience in the present company varied from one to five or more years (see Figure 2.1).

For considering the effect of spa therapists' work experience on their expectations and actual perceptions on empowerment-related aspects, the respondents were formed into two groups. Accordingly, seven spa therapists who had been working in the present company for 1–4 years were combined into Group 1, and six spa therapists with work-experience on the present work-site for five or more years formed Group 2. The length of work experience of the spa therapists in Spa A and Spa C varied from 1 to 5 or more

years, whereas in Spa B only 1 out of 5 therapists had been working in the present company for 5 or more years.

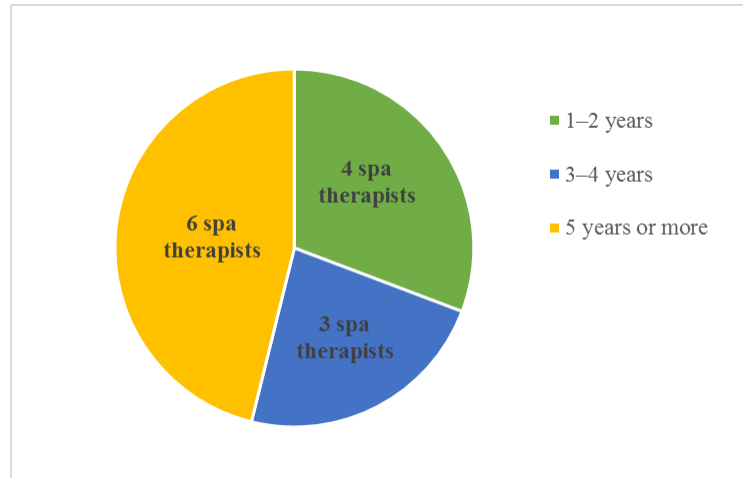


Figure 2.1. Spa therapists' ($n = 13$) work experience in the present company (compiled by the author)

The following part of the work focuses on the analysis of the spa therapists' expectations and perceptions on empowerment-related aspects (see Appendix 2, Part 1). Regarding the present research, which entailed three different spa businesses with 13 respondents in total, the data with higher standard deviation was further inspected in closer detail. Hence, in case of higher standard deviation the data was analysed in two stages. Firstly, the results were compared to discover whether the variability of responses appeared within one spa business setting, i.e. the replies of spa therapists in one spa differed significantly from the other spas, or there were one or two replies with different scores in all three spas. Secondly, the responses were compared in relation to the length of work experience for discovering any patterns among the responses of the employees with shorter and longer work experience.

The study results of data analysis based on questionnaires are presented in Table 2.5. To point out the responses that stood out among the others after the data analysis, the study results on Table 2.5 are presented by a certain colour-code. Namely, the responses with significantly high or low mean value ($m = 4.5-5.0$, or $m < 3.0$) are marked in bold-print. The responses with noticeably high standard deviation ($s > 0.5$) are toned grey.

Table 2.5. Spa-therapists' expectations and actual perception of aspects of employee empowerment in their organisation (assessed on the scale from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree')

| | Statements on the aspects of employee empowerment | Mean score | Standard deviation |
|-----|--|------------|--------------------|
| 1. | Knowing the values and goals of the company is important for everybody to work well. | 3.9 | 0.8 |
| | I know the values and the goals of my company very well. | 3.9 | 0.8 |
| 2. | Well-motivated employees are more satisfied with their job. | 4.8 | 0.4 |
| | I am satisfied with my present job. | 3.6 | 0.7 |
| 3. | Practical skills and competences are important for working well. | 5.0 | 0.0 |
| | I can participate free of charge in training courses to improve my skills (e.g. massage techniques, languages). | 3.2 | 1.1 |
| 4. | Employees must know their job duties and responsibilities very well. | 4.4 | 0.5 |
| | I know well my rights and code of conduct as a spa therapist. | 3.6 | 0.5 |
| 5. | Positive atmosphere among all staff members is essential for working well. | 4.5 | 0.5 |
| | I can talk with my manager about everything that affects my job performance. | 3.5 | 1.3 |
| 6. | Each employee must have access to the information needed to provide proper service. | 4.4 | 0.5 |
| | I have enough information for solving the problems and making decisions on my own. | 3.2 | 0.4 |
| 7. | Cultural differences of the staff members do not influence work performance. | 3.2 | 0.4 |
| | I communicate the same way with all my colleagues no matter what is their nationality. | 3.2 | 0.4 |
| 8. | Managers should involve spa therapists in spa management (e.g. when making decisions on customer service and product development). | 3.8 | 0.7 |
| | I take part in discussions about new treatments, products, and customer-related questions. | 3.2 | 0.9 |
| 9. | Managers should often give and ask feedback. | 4.8 | 0.4 |
| | I often talk about my job performance with my manager. | 3.4 | 1.0 |
| 10. | Mutual trust between all the staff members is very important for working well. | 4.8 | 0.4 |
| | My manager is confident in me. | 3.4 | 1.0 |

Source: Study results based on the written questionnaires (author's calculations)

The marked responses are discussed in a closer detail and are illustrated by figures or tables; textual explanations are added to each table or figure respectively. The further discussion on the study results in relation to the information retrieved from the interviews with spa managers and the research findings from critical literature review will be presented in Chapter 3.

The questionnaire started with the statements about the company value system – whether the employees were familiar with the values of the company and whether they considered knowing the company values important for individual work performance. The mean score of the responses ($m = 3.9$) conveyed the general acknowledgment and importance of knowing the company's value system. However, high standard deviation ($s = 0.8$) referred to noticeable differences among the respondents (see Figure 2.2).

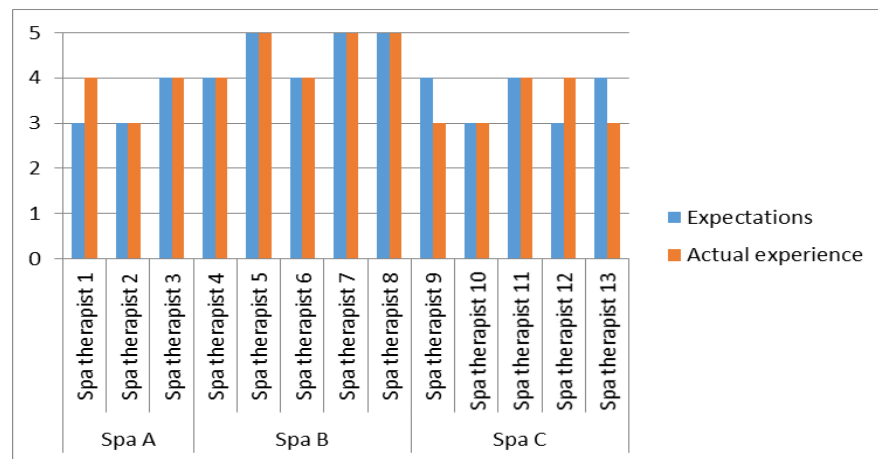


Figure 2.2. Spa-therapists' expectations and actual perception in relation to the values and goals of their organisation (compiled by the author)

While evaluating the extent of knowing the values and goals of the company and relating it to the efficiency of individual work performance, the respondents of Spa A and Spa C showed much hesitation on the topic while half of the respondents did not agree nor disagree with the statements. In addition, two respondents replied that they knew well the values and goals of the company but were not sure whether knowing the values played much role in improving individual work performance. The spa therapists of the Spa B, at the same time, had a unanimously strong expectation that knowing the

values and goals of the company would lead to better work results; they were also well aware of the organisation's value system.

The second topic under evaluation was related to employee motivation and job satisfaction. Here, all spa therapists agreed that job satisfaction was strongly dependent on motivation. Namely, 11 out of 13 spa therapists strongly agreed that well-motivated employees were more satisfied with their job ($m = 4.8$). At the same time, the perception about individual level of job satisfaction indicated uncertainty ($m = 3.6$) and conveyed notable differences ($s = 0.7$). Further data analysis presented randomly higher and lower results throughout all the spas. However, the second stage of analysis, when the study results were compared on the basis of spa therapists' work experience, revealed notable pattern (see Table 2.6). Namely, none of the spa therapists with work experience for five or more years could clearly state whether they were satisfied or not with their present job (Group 1 $m = 3.0$) whereas all of the employees with less work experience stated that they were satisfied with their job (Group 2 $m = 4.1$).

Table 2.6. Spa-therapists' expectations and actual perception on empowerment-related aspects compared to their work experience

| Aspects of employee empowerment | Employee expectations and actual experiences on employee empowerment | Total Mean | Group 1 Mean | Group 2 Mean |
|--|---|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Motivation and job satisfaction | Well-motivated employees are more satisfied with their job. | 4.8 | 4.9 | 4.8 |
| | I am satisfied with my present job. | 3.6 | 4.1 | 3.0 |
| Employee involvement and participation | Managers should involve spa therapists in spa management (e.g. while making decisions related to customer service and product development). | 3.8 | 3.9 | 3.7 |
| | I take part in discussions about new treatments, products, and customer-related questions. | 3.2 | 2.7 | 3.7 |

Note: Group 1 – spa therapists with work-experience of 1–4 years; Group 2 – spa therapists with work-experience for 5 or more years).

Source: Compiled and calculated by the author

Thirdly, the spa therapists evaluated the importance of proficiency in daily work processes and their possibilities to participate in the training courses. All spa therapists unanimously considered practical job skills essential for a good job performance ($m = 5.0$). However, there was a big variance ($s = 1.1$) of responses about the possibility to participate in the training courses (see Figure 2.3).

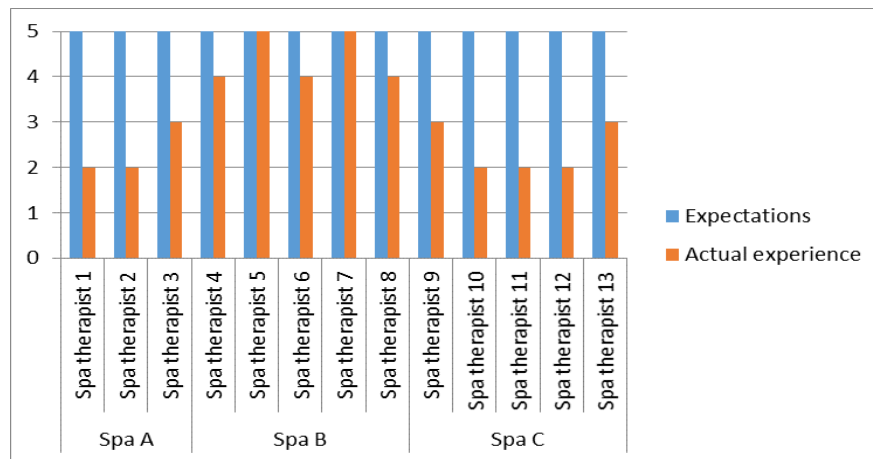


Figure 2.3. Spa-therapists' expectations in relation to the importance of proficiency to an individual work performance and actual experience about participation in training courses (compiled by the author)

The analysis showed that the replies of Spa A, Spa B and Spa C were quite similar within each business setting (the mean scores being respectively 2.3, 4.4 and 2.4). Accordingly, in Spa B, all therapists could participate in free training courses for improving their skills, whereas in case of Spa A and Spa C, the spa therapists did not mark this possibility.

The fourth topic under study was employee rights and responsibilities. According to the results, awareness on employees job duties and responsibilities was considered important ($m = 4.4$). An individual level of knowledge about one's rights and code of conduct, however, caused more hesitation. While 8 respondents evaluated their level of knowledge with 4 points, 5 out of 13 spa therapists could not decide whether to agree or disagree whether they know well enough their rights and code of conduct as a spa therapist.

Fifthly, the respondents evaluated the importance of positive atmosphere at worksite and the communication between themselves and the manager (see Figure 2.4). The scores conveyed rather strong agreement ($m = 4.5$) with the idea that positive atmosphere among all staff members is essential for working well.

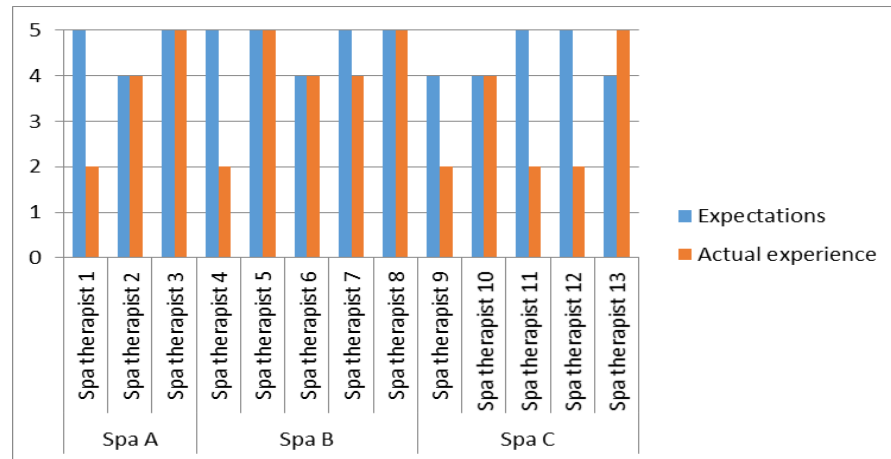


Figure 2.4. Spa-therapists' expectations about the importance of positive atmosphere on worksite and their actual experience while communicating with the spa manager (compiled by the author)

However, the data on spa therapists' actual experience while talking with their managers about the causes affecting their job performance was characterised by the highest deviation score ($s = 1.3$), referring to big differences among individual responses. Closer inspection showed that the responses varied largely throughout all the business settings (see Figure 2.4). Namely, 5 therapists out of 13 could not talk with their managers about everything that affected their job performance. The others, at the same time, agreed that they can always talk to their manager.

The sixth set of statements was related to the information exchange. All spa therapists agreed that employees must have access to the information needed to provide proper service ($m = 4.4$). However, while evaluating whether they personally have enough information for problem-solving and individual decision-making, only 2 out of 13 agreed that they had enough information. The others could not state whether they agree or disagree with the statement.

The seventh topic considered the influence of employee's cultural background to one's work performance and interpersonal relationships. In both cases, whether cultural differences influenced individual work performance, and whether the spa therapists communicated the same way with all the colleagues regardless of their nationality, all respondents could not agree nor disagree ($m = 3.2$; $s = 0.4$).

The next topic considered spa therapists' expectations and actual perception on employee involvement and participation. Here, the scores conveyed quite big differences on the responses ($s = 0.7$ and $s = 0.9$). In relation to employee involvement in spa management the further analysis revealed differences among the employees depending on the length of work experience (see Table 2.6).

The following brings out the effect of the spa therapists' work experience on their expectations and actual perception on employee involvement and participation. Namely, 4 out of 6 spa therapists with work experience for five or more years were involved by their managers in the discussions on managerial topics ($m = 3.7$) while only 2 out of 7 spa therapists with few years work experience had participated in discussions about new treatments, products or customer-related questions ($m = 2.7$). At the same time, the expectation towards employee involvement was almost equally high among all spa therapists ($m = 3.8$) with the mean scores of employees with different work experience varying only by 0.2 points.

The ninth set of statements involved feedback. The scores conveyed strong agreement ($m = 4.8$) with the idea that managers should give and ask frequent feedback. At the same time, the data results referred to big differences among individual responses ($s = 0.9$). Closer inspection showed that the responses varied largely throughout all the business settings (see Figure 2.5), with 6 therapists out of 13 not talking with their managers about everything that affected their job performance. The others, at the same time, agreed that they can often talk about their job performance with their manager. In addition, compared to the responses given in the section about communication, the lower scores were given by the same respondents who had given lower score to their communication with the spa manager.

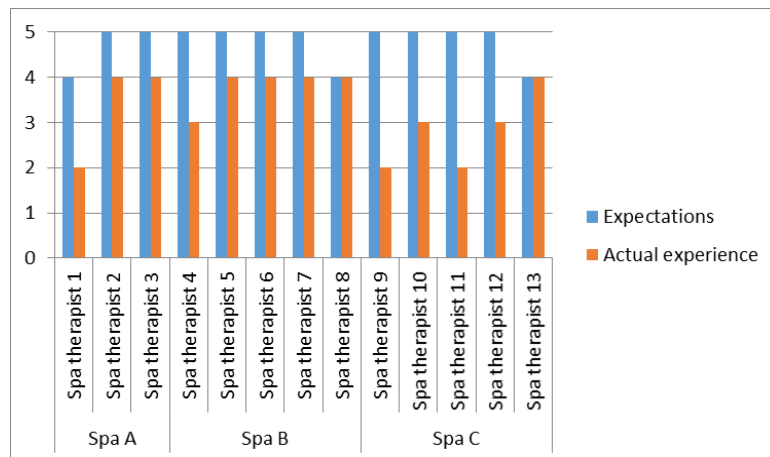


Figure 2.5. Spa-therapists' expectations and perceptions about feedback on one's job performance (compiled by the author)

The last section in Part 1 considered the topic of trust between all staff members and between the managers and their subordinates (see Figure 2.6). Similarly to the data retrieved on the topic of communication, the data was characterised by high deviation ($s = 0.9$), referring to big differences among individual responses. The responses varied largely throughout all the business settings, whereas 2 therapists out of 13 did not feel that they were trusted by their manager and 5 respondents replied 'agree or disagree', thus having no exact idea whether or not their manager trusted them.

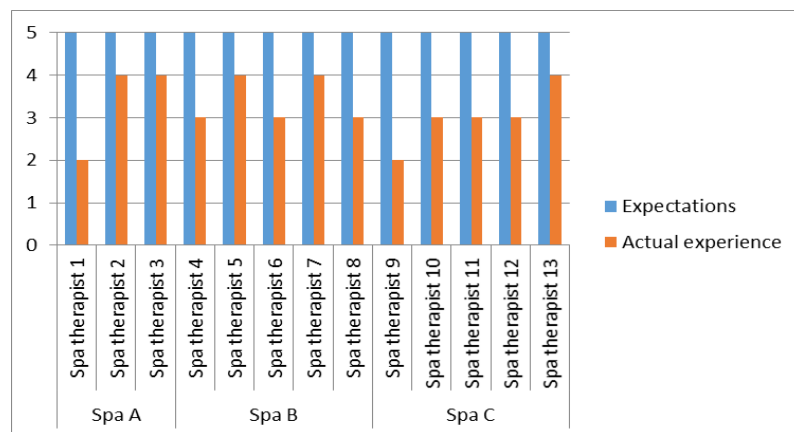


Figure 2.6. Spa-therapists' expectations on the importance of trust between staff and their actual perception on manager's confidence in them (compiled by the author)

The following presents the study results on motivators that the spa therapists considered important for working efficiently and enthusiastically if all the options would be available, and, secondly, the aspects that motivated them at present (see Figure 2.7).

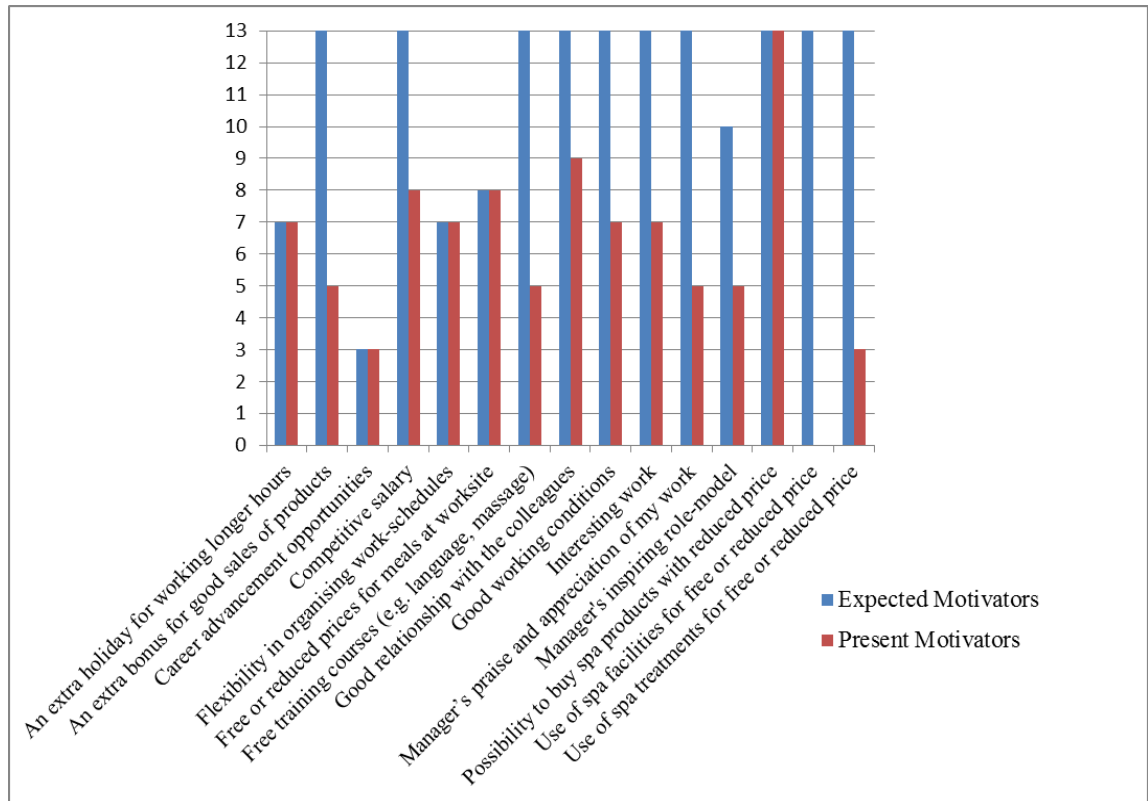


Figure 2.7. Spa therapists' ($n = 13$) expected and present motivators for working efficiently and enthusiastically (compiled by the author)

All responses were compared to one another to discover whether the variability of responses appeared throughout all the spa business settings or the replies of one spa differed significantly from the other spas. Accordingly, the responses within one spa business setting were often quite similar. Secondly, the responses were compared in relation to the length of work experience. The latter analysis did not reveal significant patterns. Overall, the study results showed big difference between the expected and present motivators. The only aspect, where the expectation and actual situation met was the possibility to buy spa products with reduced price. The opposite situation involved the use of spa facilities, where all the respondents marked it as a motivator to work

more efficiently and enthusiastically. At the same time, none of them had such motivator at present. The use of spa treatments was somewhat more accessible – while all spa therapists expressed their desire for using spa treatments for free or with reduced price, the spa therapists from Spa A ($n = 3$) had this opportunity at present.

Other aspects that were unanimously considered motivating were an extra bonus for good sales of products, competitive salary, free training courses, good relationships, good working conditions, and interesting work. However, at present there were much less motivators. Thus, an extra bonus of sales motivated in Spa C; competitive salary motivated 2–3 spa therapists in each spa; free training courses motivated in Spa B; good relationships motivated 3 spa therapist in each spa; good working conditions motivated 1 spa therapist in Spa A, everyone in Spa B and none in Spa C; interesting work motivated everyone in Spa B and 1 spa therapists in both Spa A and Spa C. An extra holiday for working longer hours, free prices on meals and manager's inspiring role model were considered less motivating. The least motivating was career advancement opportunity, which was brought out only by 1 spa therapist in each spa.

The present chapter gave an overview of the comparative case study on employee empowerment in Italian spa businesses via mixed-method strategy by using interviews and written questionnaires as instruments for retrieving information from the spa managers' and spa therapists' about empowerment-related aspects at their worksite. After describing the data collection practicalities, the focus was laid upon data analysis. Qualitative content analysis was applied to the textual data retrieved from the semi-structured interviews by coding and theming according to the previous study findings. The data retrieved from questionnaires was analysed with Excel 2013 software application by mean scores, standard deviations and total responses. Data analysis was followed by the presentation of study results. The next chapter will elaborate on the study results by discussing the spa managers' and spa therapists' responses alongside with research findings from the critical literature review and theoretical framework of empowerment. In addition, the discussion includes recommendations to the spa managers for applying empowerment principles in a spa business setting.

3. DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPLYING EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT IN A SPA BUSINESS SETTING

The present chapter elaborates on the study results by discussing the spa employees' responses in the light of the critical literature review and theoretical framework of empowerment presented in the first chapter. By comparing the spa therapists' expectations and their actual experience on empowerment, together with their managers' point of view, and based on the study results and findings from research done previously in this field, the thesis provides recommendations for implementing employee empowerment in a spa business setting.

The discussion is based on the comparative case study on employee empowerment in three spa businesses in Italy that was delivered by interviewing the spa managers and conducting survey questionnaires with the spa therapists working in the corresponding organisations ($n = 13$). All spa managers and spa therapists from the corresponding spa businesses participated in the research. Thus, the sample that is a chosen group to get information about larger group of people (Kothari, 2013) was all-inclusive and featured as a comprehensive study base for reaching the goal of the master thesis – to provide spa managers with the proposals for implementing employee empowerment in a spa business setting.

Accordingly, the provided recommendations would be relevant to the involved organisations as well as to the other businesses with the similar organisational structure and operational activities in the field of spa industry. The recommendations are provided throughout the chapter alongside with the discussion of the study results. In addition, for providing the managers with a practical tool for supporting them while

implementing empowerment-related principles in their business setting, the practical recommendations were outlined in a concise table format (see Appendix 4).

While choosing proper research methodology for the present study, the critical literature review on tourism research revealed an effective use of mixed-method case study approach. This type of research was considered effective in the case of tourism studies by many authors (Beeton, 2005; Bernard, 2011; Botterill and Platenkamp, 2012; Bryman, 2006; Holden, 2006; Walle, 1997) by providing deeper understanding of the research object and reliable data rather than qualitative or quantitative method alone could do. Thus, the use of mixed method case study approach by applying both qualitative and quantitative method via interviews and questionnaires proved to be a well-grounded choice in case of the present research. For that, two research instruments were prepared – semi-structured interviews and written questionnaires that were used to find answers to the research questions regarding spa managers' and spa therapists' perceptions on empowerment-related aspects in their work environment.

Qualitative method was applied through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, that researchers have been considered as an effective means for receiving as much information as possible in a structured and comparable way, especially when there might not be another chance to meet with the respondent for elaborating on the topic (Bernard, 2011; James & Busher, 2012). The interviews were conducted with the spa managers in their work environments. The interview guide with open-ended questions provided an effective basis for enabling the spa managers to reflect upon their managerial activities and analyse the actions through a variety of topics relevant for reaching high-level service provision, productivity and a competitive edge. The topics under discussion were based on the literature findings from the thematic works of Armache (2013), Covey and Merrill (2006), Eylon and Au (1999), Koc (2013), Meng and Han (2014), Lashley (1995), Morreale and Schockley-Zalabak (2014), and Spreitzer, 1995.

Quantitative part of the research was conveyed through written questionnaires that had been the most frequently used tool in the studies described in the literature review on employee empowerment by Armache, 2013; Koc, 2013; Lashley, 1995; Meng and Han, 2014; and Spreizer, 1995. The choice of a research instrument proved to be effective in the case of the present research for providing reliable data for highlighting the similarities and differences between the research findings. Moreover, information collected via written survey questionnaires gave an informative insight into spa therapists' expectations and actual perceptions on empowerment-related aspects thus proving to be a useful exploratory manner to study the topic in spa business settings.

Throughout the cited works, empowerment was often discussed in terms of motivational processes of employees. Accordingly, the motivational approach of empowerment and the role of intrinsic motivators for relation to the personal growth and professional development has often been a prevailing feature in relation to empowerment studies (Armache, 2013; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Lashley, 1995, 2001; Swart et al., 2005; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Hence, the ideas of motivational theorists and the related theories presented by Maslow, Herzberg and Alderfer (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Lyons, 2007; Maslow, 1954) were explained closer in the theoretical part and were considered relevant while interpreting the results of the present research.

Spa managers' awareness and application of empowerment-related principles, and spa-therapists' expectations and actual perception of aspects of employee empowerment in their organisation were studied under the following topics: company's value and goals; motivation and job satisfaction; training and skills; communication, information exchange, and employee rights and responsibilities; employee involvement; and feedback. The following part of the thesis highlights the similarities and differences between the study findings and those presented in the critical literature review. Alongside with the discussion, the recommendations are provided for spa managers for implementing empowerment-related principles in their worksite for helping the employees to reach the highest levels of motivations, job satisfaction and productivity.

Concerning the topic about spa managers' awareness on the concept of empowerment in the context of employee management in their business setting, none of the managers had knowledgeably applied any empowerment techniques in their business setting. However, they had tried to increase the service quality in their businesses and affect employee motivation and job satisfaction by random initiatives ranging from personal discussions to inspiring team-meetings, from free training courses to bonuses for good sales. Possibility to consider all related topics under one notion had not featured in their managerial strategy. Randomness in such efforts was conveyed by a frequent use of words like 'sometimes', 'unaware', 'once, I think', and 'seldom'. Here, the managers are recommended to apply more straightforward leadership style, while according to Boella & Goss-Turner (2013), empowering leader is the one who provides his subordinates with mutually respected rules, explanations and responsibility to act within the limits of one's authority. Here, as noted by Bacon (2006) and D'Angelo (2006), a clear formulation of boundaries needs to be set to avoid boundary violations that are most often related to ethics, self-respect, insensitive behaviour, and loss of privacy.

In the course of the interviews, the managers acknowledged that following employee empowerment principles comprehensively could be a useful managerial strategy for identifying the reasons for low job satisfaction, high turnover intentions, and lack of motivation. Conger and Kanungo's (1998) original framework (see Figure 1.1) on the process of empowerment would become useful to the managers to get a structured understanding of related stages that would lead from detecting the reasons of powerlessness to achieving the further tasks with confidence and higher effectiveness. Moreover, they would find it useful to be able to recognise employees' state of empowerment and disempowerment (Van Oudtshoorn & Thomas, 1995; see Table 1.1) and by knowing the benefits of empowerment and problems that are resulted from disempowerment in hospitality businesses, as stated by Lashley (1995; see Table 1.2). Then, the spa managers could detect the source of disempowerment and apply any of the following empowerment-related principles that are related to specific topics. The

following highlights the similarities and differences of research findings in the light of the theoretical background presented in the first part of the thesis.

Regarding the company goals and values, all managers in the present study shared the values related to high work ethics, trust and team-work; the main goals of the company were high customer satisfaction and productivity. Spa therapists considered mutual trust between all the staff members very important for working well. At the same time, the relationship with the manager differed largely among all spas, showing that some employees did not feel that their manager trusted them. A topic of trust that was studied in detail by the researchers Covey and Merrill (2006), Morreale and Schockley-Zalabak (2014), and Spreizer (1995), was considered of high importance in forming a solid base for friendly, supportive and productive communication. As the study results revealed that all the spa therapists did not feel themselves trustworthy in their manager's opinion, the managers are recommended to convey trust by giving meaningful assignments, and provide employees authority and means for successfully fulfilling their job tasks.

However, regardless its importance conveyed through thematic literature, only one manager considered the topic of values and goals important to the extent that he took it as his personal concern to discuss it with the staff, and hoping that this way he will contribute to their better work performance. To support these ideas, according to Schein (as cited in Lashley, 2001, p. 5) empowering employees means establishing their moral involvement with the organisation which means that the person intrinsically shares the values and goals of the company, thus showing more involvement to job duties and resulting in high-quality work performance. To show the delicate side of the topic, Sparrow et al. (2004) and Koc (2013) have pointed at challenges that might result from multinational business settings while depending on employees' cultural background each person can have different perception and response to work empowerment, which necessarily does not correspond to the strategy applied by the manager.

McDonald (2014) has stressed the importance of masterfully designed recruitment process and covering the topic already while hiring new employees, to reveal the real

essence of the applicants before they became the staff member. In addition, the present study results revealed that if the manager considered the topic of sharing the organisational goals and values important and discussed it personally with all staff, the same notion was conveyed to the employees thus making them realise the importance of sharing the same values for reaching the highest work effectiveness. Accordingly, the managers are recommended to deliver their expectation towards employees already during the hiring to have a higher chance to recruit people whose individual value system concords with the organisational values. Moreover, they should provide new employees with a training session for getting good comprehension about the company values and goals to act accordingly throughout all work situations. In case of multicultural staff the manager should consider that the perception of values might differ depending on one's cultural background.

While discussing how to motivate employees to work effectively and enthusiastically, the managers brought out good interpersonal relationships, their own inspiring role model and a possibility to purchase spa products with a discount price. One manager considered free training courses on massage techniques or foreign languages an effective way to motivate people work in this business setting. At the same time, all managers pointed at the problem of high turnover rate of hospitality industry. The manager who considered free training courses the best motivator, stated at the same time that after the therapists had gained lots of knowledge and practice in his spa they left after five or six years of working.

This tendency was supported by the results seen in the data analysis of spa therapists' motivators at workplace. Namely, most of the spa therapists with work experience for five or more years showed dissatisfaction with their present job. It could be related to the need for new or more challenging work environment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Wilson, 2011). In this case, the managers are recommended to enable employees to vary their work tasks and increase their responsibility as suggested by Bacon (2006). For example, the employees could be involved in product development – brainstorm on new treatments and their application, discussing the better use of products.

The idea of varying the work tasks was somewhat used in all spas as all therapists in the involved businesses worked also as receptionists thus having a wider task-set than spa therapists who convey solely the treatments. Such work arrangement provided employees with a wider range of tasks by requiring more interaction with clients at the reception and wider knowledge on the treatments and products offered in the spa. In addition, two managers made plans about involving one or two therapists with longer work experience in their managerial activities while thinking that such proposal would affect positively employee motivation to work more efficiently. At the same time, the study results revealed one peculiarity of working in the spa industry – spa therapists' relatively low need for career advancement opportunities. Only one spa therapist in each spa noted it as a motivator for working efficiently and enthusiastically.

Accordingly, it can be proposed that spa therapists' career advancement ideas are strongly related to their wish to perform with high proficiency within the limits of their profession (i.e. give massage) and do it under good work conditions and for competitive salary. Spa therapists' aim is not strongly related to the need to move to the higher job position in the organisational structure but to receive the highest qualification within the limits of their profession. This idea is supported by the unanimously high expectation of working in good work conditions, get free training to improve the skills whether on languages or new massage techniques, and receive salary that meets or is above the industry average.

In summary, as stated by the motivational theorists, the fundamental needs must be met before upper-level needs begin to drive the behaviour. Moreover, while relying on the works of several scholars (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Kandampully et al., 2001, 2014; Lyons, 2007; Maslow, 1954), such factors as achievement, growth, recognition and interesting work itself can turn into motivators only after meeting the basic conditions, such as adequate salary, good work conditions, and positive work atmosphere. At the same time, when considering the hierarchy of needs applied in the work environment (see Figure 1.2) and look at the present study results retrieved from the interviews with spa managers, each subordinates' aim could be reaching self-efficacy and sense of

achievement through reaching the highest possible job position in their organisation. However, the study result on spa therapists' motivators conveyed different options for fulfilling the needs of achievement and self-esteem.

Accordingly, to form a skilful and satisfied staff, the spa managers are recommended to invest in the spa facilities and high-quality equipment. They should aim at providing the spa therapists with proper work environment that involves both physical (e.g. comfortable clothing, well-functioning treatment rooms and facilities, possibility to use spa facilities for increasing one's physical well-being) and monetary aspects (e.g. competitive salary, bonuses for good sale of products, discount while purchasing the products on sale). However, to decrease the turnover intention and increase employee motivation, spa managers should provide their employees with interesting work tasks, an opportunity for professional advancement, and recognition for accomplishment on their present job position (i.e. enable them to become highly skilled professional by acquiring skills on a variety of massage techniques and profound knowledge on product used in treatments). In addition, mutually respectful and trusting interpersonal relationships that were stressed by both the managers and spa therapists feature as an essential element in the spa work environment.

While elaboration on the topics of communication, information, rights and responsibilities, the spa managers expected to make their services more responsive and of higher quality. They brought out the need for readiness to deal with complaints quickly and professionally, as it was considered an important area where they saw much need for improvement among their staff members. As suggested by McDonald in describing the case of empowerment based on Ritz-Carlton hotels (2014), instead of a mishap during the treatment, compassion and attention offered by the therapists and managers during the rest of the stay at the hotel would lead to greater customer satisfaction. For example, two managers out of three pointed out the cases where more thank-you-letters were received after something out-of-ordinary had happened and was mended by mutually satisfying solution. At the same time, when the customers had received a high-quality standard service they did not tend to express extra gratitude. In

such cases, though provided in accordance with the quality requirements, the service had probably been seen too impersonal for creating special feelings about it.

To provide customers with a memorable experience, any problem should be seen as a good possibility to create an extra value with prolonged emotional attachment to the service provided on-site, as stated by Cohen and Bodeker (2008); Pine and Gilmore (1999). Accordingly, it is recommended to follow the statement of one manager ‘We don’t have problems; we have opportunities’ which conveys the idea of a service encounter with a wide possibility to provide the knowledgeable and experience-prone spa-clientele with experience-like services.

Regarding good interpersonal relationships, both spa managers and spa therapists acknowledged the importance of positive work atmosphere that derives from friendly, open and mutual trusting communication with all staff members. Showing the complexity of the topic, communication was considered one of the risk areas in relation to empowerment. According to the research findings from Kruja et al. (2016), Meng and Han (2014), Mann (2002; 2004), Ye (2012), Yukl and Becker (2006), the ways of communication between subordinates and managers are prone to misunderstanding due to various aspects (e.g. different value base, misinformation, cultural differences, mistrust).

To overcome possible hindrances, the managers are recommended to discuss work goals and job performance with all employees by having a productive conversation with open-ended questions and give positive comments to show the subordinates that their opinions and suggestions have been heard and respected. Although it can be more time consuming, the managers are recommended to guide people by asking questions, not telling them what to do, and ask open-ended questions and listen closely to understand the situation under discussion properly. Open communication involves the skills of giving constructive feedback and receiving feedback from other staff members. As pointed out by Boella and Goss-Turner (2013), though giving feedback is traditionally considered the role of human resource specialist, in case of a spa business setting with a

small organisational structure, the spa manager often needs to fulfil the role of human resource manager for exchanging information and providing feedback. As McLain and Krieger (2013) showed by their study of a global hospitality chain, talking with employees about their work performance, encouraging the staff members to share their experiences, thoughts and opinions would lead to the feeling of empowerment, and, thus, to higher work commitment.

Regarding the topics of employee involvement and participation, all the managers said they involved the spa therapists in the discussions about treatments and products. However, they usually asked for advice from the employees with longer work experience. This fact was supported by the study results from the spa therapists about involvement, where their responses on the level of involvement were quite different. Thus, most of the spa therapists with more than five years' work experience were often involved to the discussions on new treatments and customer service issues. At the same time, only few younger colleagues had been involved in any management related discussions.

However, Swart et al. (2005) have pointed out that through increased involvement, the employees would be empowered and the work processes could be improved. Moreover, as brought out by Boella and Goss-Turner (2013), when subordinates have been given more responsibility, the roles of management change and instead of dictating and controlling, coaching and inspiring would become their important roles. Thus, the managers are recommended to involve employees more in the product development processes, ask their advice and expertise as they are the real professionals on treatments and feel sense of accomplishment when they are more involved in activities related to product and service development.

Regarding the topic of training and skills, the spa therapists showed hesitance while answering to the question about attending the training courses for free, thus displaying the discord between their expectations and actual perception of the possibility to develop one's skills. As a necessity of possessing good practical skills was conveyed

unanimously by all the therapists, and the managers too referred to the need of highly skilled staff, the managers are recommended to retrieve more knowledge about their subordinates actual career goals and personal. For example, some therapists would need support in improving language skills, the others would gain from enhancing their communication skills. Thus, the managers should map the spa therapists' individual study needs and provide the training accordingly.

The groups of persons who would potentially benefit from the results of the study and the related recommendations are the spa managers, spa therapists, and scholars. Accordingly, during the interviews, the spa managers took time off from their daily errands and analysed their management strategies, interpersonal relationships with the colleagues, information exchange and feedback, employee motivation and productivity together with other areas important for effective and inspiring management. Successively, they became more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the managerial strategies applied in their organisation and reflected upon their subordinates' probable perception of empowerment-related implications in the company. Study results provide the managers with deeper insight into their work environment in the light of empowerment.

Spa therapists, in turn, had a chance to reflect on their everyday work, think about their expectations towards participation in organisational work processes and analyse their present level of involvement. Accordingly, while participating in the study, the spa therapists had a chance to reflect on such areas like motivation, training, communication, interpersonal relationships, and feedback, and discover whether there were any areas that could be improved to increase their motivation, job satisfaction and effectiveness. Thirdly, as employee empowerment has been often considered as an effective managerial strategy to increase organisation's competitive advantage through employees' increased productivity and lower turnover intentions, the scholars might have detected some intriguing gaps in this work for further research topics. For example, the topic of research could be the effect of cultural differences on acceptance of empowerment techniques, and to measure the role of technological advancement in

customer services by increasing employee's knowledge base and, hence, facilitating information exchange.

As stated earlier, the recommendations for the spa managers about the actions for implementing empowerment in the spa business setting were presented throughout the discussion as well as on the table (see Appendix 4). The list of recommendations is based on the ideas retrieved from the works of Armache (2005), Bacon (2006), Covey and Merrill (2006), D'Angelo (2006), Gill et al. (2010), Kandampully (2014), Koc (2013), Kruja et al. (2016), Ye (2012), and the present study results. The outline of the table follows the structure of the basis for interviews and questionnaires that were conducted with the spa employees during the research. The spa managers would benefit from the concise set of propositions while applying empowerment-related principles in their business setting, thus turning their previously random actions into well-reasoned part of their daily employee management.

With wider scope of temporal, human and financial resources, the research could be extended to study a wider variety of spas and reach outside the borders of one country. Accordingly, the recommendations for further research include the study of implications of employee empowerment in different cultural contexts to discover the effect of cultural differences on spa therapists' acceptance of empowerment-related aspects in managerial strategies. Another intriguing and beneficial topic would be implication of empowerment in the spa and wellness industry in the era of technological advancement and with the influx of tools and devices that help to increase efficiency at work environments (e.g. hospitality industry software, hardware and services for guest, recreation, and timeshare management; information technology for social networking). In addition, the research instruments (interview guide and written questionnaire) compiled for this study could be used for further study purposes.

CONCLUSION

The present master thesis was compiled around a problem question on how knowledgeable application of employee empowerment would affect employee motivation and job satisfaction thus enabling high customer satisfaction and leading to higher productivity. To meet the goal of the master thesis about providing the spa managers with the recommendations for implementing employee empowerment principles in a spa business setting, the present research was prepared and conducted, involving the spa managers and spa therapists in three Italian spa business settings.

The research aimed at finding answers to the following research questions: 1) How do the spa managers acknowledge and apply the principles of employee empowerment in their spa business setting, and 2) What are the spa-therapists' expectations and actual perceptions on employee empowerment in their work environment?. Accordingly, by comparing the employees' expectations and their actual experience on empowerment, together with their managers' point of view, and based on the study results and findings from research done previously in this field, the thesis provides recommendations for applying empowerment principles in a spa business setting.

To achieve the set goal and answer the research questions, the research was delivered in the following steps. Firstly, critical literature review on employee empowerment in service industry. Based on the findings from the literature review, a set of relevant aspects of empowerment were used as a basis for studying empowerment throughout the whole research process. Secondly, comparative case study of employee empowerment in three Italian spas was prepared by compiling the research instruments—interviews for questioning the spa managers, and written questionnaires to the spa therapists, and was conducted in February–March, 2016, in their actual business settings. Next, qualitative content analysis was applied to the textual data retrieved

through the semi-structured interviews based on coding and theming that followed the aspects retrieved from the previous study findings. The data that was retrieved with written questionnaires was analysed with Excel 2013 software application by comparing the mean scores, standard deviations and total sum of responses. Data analysis was followed by the presentation of study results. The last stage of the research involved discussing the study results and presentation of the recommendations for applying empowerment principles in a spa business setting.

A mixed-method case study approach was used by combining qualitative and quantitative methods via interviews and written questionnaires to retrieve information from both counterparts – the spa managers and spa therapists. Interviews provided in-depth information from the spa managers for a deeper understanding of the topic in the specific organisation. Written survey questionnaires provided comparable data that allowed analysing the spa therapists' expectations and actual perceptions on the implications of empowerment in their organisations.

The author fully acknowledges the limitations of the present research that can result from the small sample size and the choice of applied research methods and instruments. However, as the sample included all employees in each spa business setting, it formed a comprehensive and informative study base for answering the research questions and reaching the goal of the thesis about providing recommendations to the spa managers for implementing employee empowerment principles in the spa business setting. Furthermore, alongside with mentioned limitations, the study results allowed making generalisations for replying to the firstly stated problem question on a wider scope.

Theoretical and empirical research about employee empowerment in spa business settings provided answers to the initially stated research questions about spa managers' awareness and actions related to employee empowerment in their spa business setting, and spa therapists' expectations and actual perceptions on implications of employee empowerment in their work environment. Discussion on aspects, that have been pointed out in the critical literature review and in the empirical part of the study, shows how

enhancing individuals' self-perception by providing them with relevant information and optimum skills to perform the job tasks in the best possible level would improve their work performance and pave a road to higher customer satisfaction. By appreciating each employee's contribution into daily operations in physically as well as mentally challenging spa service environment, the managers would gain and keep mutual respect and trust. Accordingly, they are elevating employee's self-esteem and feeling of appreciation that along with the opportunity to personal and professional development are considered the main motivators for reaching highest effectiveness retain enthusiasm.

The aspects of empowerment that were studied throughout the research involved the following topics: organisational and personal values; employee motivation and job satisfaction; communication and information exchange; employee rights and responsibilities; employee involvement in product development and customer service delivery; training possibilities to enhance spa therapists' skills; and provision of feedback to the manager and from the manager to the subordinates.

The interviews with the spa managers revealed their constant concern for high turnover intention among spa therapists, being closely related to the lack of motivational factors at workplace as seen from the study results about spa therapists' expectations and actual perceptions of motivators at workplace. Here implementation of employee empowerment would lead to more steady staff as employees who are provided with sufficient and matter-of-fact information, training opportunities, wider variety of job-tasks and involvement in development of daily operations would have a lower intent to change the workplace and feel higher commitment to perform well in their present job position.

In addition, an empowered organization will be able to respond more quickly to changes, improvements, and customer requirements. This will happen when the spa therapists are empowered with strong knowledge base regarding their job duties, rights and responsibilities, and are provided with a sufficient amount of authority to make decisions and solve problems independently within the boundaries of given authority. Successively, empowered employees would be considered as a key to high-quality

customer service and a way to reach competitive advantage among other service providers in the field of spa and wellness industry.

The groups of people who would potentially benefit from the study results are the spa managers and spa therapists in relation to their daily work, and the scholars who might detect some intriguing ideas in this work for further research topics. With wider scope of temporal, human and financial resources, the research could capture a bigger number of respondents from a wider variety of spas as well as reach outside the borders of one country.

Accordingly, the propositions for the further research include discovering the effect of cultural differences on spa therapists' acceptance of empowerment-related principles in managerial activities. Another intriguing topic would be empowerment in the spa industry in the era of technological advancement with the increased use of tools and devices for increasing efficiency at work environments and expand space and time for personal development. In addition, the research instruments compiled for this study (interview guide and written questionnaire) could be used for further study purposes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. A guide for interviewing the spa managers

- **Background information**

Please introduce your company (the location, the space, the staff, the main customer groups).

How long have you worked in the field and in this company?

Where and what have you studied before reaching your present position?

- **Value system**

Are you familiar with the values of your company?

Do you share the same values?

Have you introduced the company values to your staff? If yes, then how?

Probe: How should the value system be introduced to the employees?

- **Motivation**

Do you consider your employees highly motivated professionals?

How satisfied are your employees with their work? Probe: with their work conditions, salary, relationship with colleagues, self-development opportunities, etc.

What are the means of motivating your staff members to work effectively and enthusiastically?

Probe: Are there any other means besides monetary bonus or raising salary? If yes, then what?

- **Communication/ Information/ Rights of the employees**

Are your employees well-informed about the company's goals and areas that influence their job-performance?

How do you help your staff know about their rights, quality-standards?

How do cultural differences of the staff members influence their work performance?

Do you organise events other than work meetings for your employees?

- **Employee involvement**

How are your employees involved in the development processes of the company?

When making managerial decisions that involve your staff members, do you involve them to the discussions?

Probes: If you involve your employees, then why and how (e.g. discuss goal achievement, productivity, financial situation)? Can you rely on your subordinates?

- **Training/ Skills**

How well-trained do you consider your staff members to be?

How often do you have a chance to participate in management-related training courses (e.g. about financial management, team-work skills, communication skills, quality management)?

What are the career opportunities of the spa therapists' in the company?

Probes: How can the employees' skills be improved? Does the company provide training?

- **Feedback**

Which way and how often do you let your staff know about their job performance?

Are you interested in your employee's comments on your managerial strategies?

How do you receive feedback from your employees?

- **Concept of employee empowerment**

Could you elaborate on the use and frequency of the concept of 'employee empowerment'?

Has the topic been discussed in the courses/ meetings where you have participated?

What would be an equivalent notion in Italian?

- **Comments**

What do you consider most relevant in employee management?

What would you like to add to our discussion on the topic?

Appendix 2. A form of written questionnaire to the spa therapists

Dear respondent,

Thank you for participating in the research about spa-therapists' job satisfaction, motivation, daily work and relationship with other staff members! You can freely express your feelings and thoughts. The questionnaires are anonymous and the information is confidential and used only for the research. Please fill in the questionnaire and send me back via e-mail liise.verpson@gmail.com. In case of questions or any comments, please use the same contact.

Thank you for your contribution! Sincerely, Anne-Liise Verpson

Please write the number that best represents your response in the score section after the statement. The scale is from 1–5 from strongly disagree to strongly agree. *N/A means that you prefer not to answer or the question is not relevant to the situation.

PART 1

| | 1 Strongly disagree | 2 Disagree | 3 Neither agree or disagree | 4 Agree | 5 Strongly agree | 6 N/A* |
|-----|--|------------|-----------------------------|---------|------------------|--------------|
| | Statement | | | | | Score |
| 1. | Knowing the values and goals of the company is important for everybody to work well. | | | | | |
| 2. | I know the values and goals of the company very well. | | | | | |
| 3. | Well-motivated employees are more satisfied with their job. | | | | | |
| 4. | I am satisfied with my present job. | | | | | |
| 5. | Practical skills and competences are very important for working well. | | | | | |
| 6. | I can participate free of charge in training courses to improve my skills (e.g. massage techniques, languages). | | | | | |
| 7. | Employees must know their job duties and responsibilities very well. | | | | | |
| 8. | I know my rights and code of conduct as a spa therapist very well. | | | | | |
| 9. | Positive atmosphere among all staff members is essential for working well. | | | | | |
| 10. | I can talk with my manager about everything that affects my job performance. | | | | | |
| 11. | Each employee must have access to the information needed to provide proper service. | | | | | |
| 12. | I have enough information for solving the problems and making decisions on my own. | | | | | |
| 13. | Cultural differences of the staff members do not influence work performance. | | | | | |
| 14. | I communicate the same way with all my colleagues no matter what is their nationality. | | | | | |
| 15. | Managers should involve spa therapists in spa management (e.g. when making decisions on customer service and product development). | | | | | |
| 16. | I take part in discussions about new treatments, products, and customer-related questions. | | | | | |
| 17. | Managers should often give and ask feedback from spa therapists. | | | | | |
| 18. | I often talk about my job performance with my manager. | | | | | |
| 19. | Mutual trust between all staff members is very important for working well. | | | | | |
| 20. | My manager is confident in me. | | | | | |

Please turn over to the next page!

Appendix 2 continued

PART 2

What would motivate you to work efficiently and enthusiastically (if possible to choose from all the given options) and what motivates you to work efficiently and enthusiastically in your present work place? You can choose more than one from 1–16. Please use X for ticking right side columns to show your choice.

| | What motivates you to work efficiently and enthusiastically? | What would motivate you if possible to use or have? | What motivates you today? |
|-----|--|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. | An extra holiday for working longer hours | | |
| 2. | An extra bonus to salary for good sales of products | | |
| 3. | Career advancement opportunities | | |
| 4. | Competitive salary | | |
| 5. | Flexibility in organising monthly work-schedules (consider individual needs) | | |
| 6. | Free or reduced prices for meals at the worksite | | |
| 7. | Free training courses (e.g. language, massage) | | |
| 8. | Good relationship with the colleagues | | |
| 9. | Good work conditions | | |
| 10. | Interesting work | | |
| 11. | Manager's praise and appreciation of my work | | |
| 12. | Manager's inspiring role-model | | |
| 13. | Possibility to buy spa products with reduced price | | |
| 14. | Use of the spa facilities for free or with reduced price | | |
| 15. | Use of the spa treatments for free or with reduced price | | |
| 16. | Other (please specify and write here) | | |

PART 3

Personal information (Please choose and tick only 1 option under each section)

- Work experience in the wellness and spa industry:
☐ Less than 1 year; ☐ 1–2 years; ☐ 3–4 years; ☐ 5 years or more.
- Work experience in the present company:
☐ Less than 1 year; ☐ 1–2 years; ☐ 3–4 years; ☐ 5 years or more.
- Special education/ training as a spa therapist:
☐ Yes; ☐ No (If no, please specify here)
- Nationality: ☐ Italian; ☐ Other.

Appendix 3. Main findings from the interviews with the spa managers on aspects of empowerment

| Manager | CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT |
|---------------------------------|---|
| A | Unfamiliar with the concept. Does not apply any certain managerial strategies. Eager to know more on the topic. |
| B | Knows the concept. Explains it through employee motivation and involvement. Does not apply related principles systematically. |
| C | Unfamiliar with the concept. Does not apply any certain managerial strategies. Curious if it is only a theory or works also in practice. |
| VALUES AND GOALS | |
| A | Knows the values and goals of the company (i.e. high profitability and satisfied clients). Does not elaborate on personal or company values. A general manager and a human resource manager introduce values and goals to the new employees on big staff meeting. Presumes that employees know the values and goals. |
| B | Knows and shares the values of the company and considers it important for working effectively and reaching the goals of the company (i.e. happy clients, satisfied staff, and high productivity). Discusses the values and goals individually with all staff. Sure about the staff's awareness of the values and goals. |
| C | Considers the topic ambiguous, as there has never been proper discussion on it during the staff meetings or with the annual meetings with general manager and human resource department. Presumes that everybody know the values and goals that probably are high quality of services and good sales results. |
| MOTIVATION AND JOB SATISFACTION | |
| A | Considers the staff motivated and satisfied. Shows appreciation for subordinates' work by sharing their work tasks in reception and keeping order in spa facilities. Employees are motivated by good interpersonal relationships, positive work atmosphere, and monthly salary; possibility to buy spa products and use treatments with reduced price. Employees are prohibited to use the spa facilities for leisure purposes, while it is not acceptable on the 5-star property. No extra bonus for good sales of products. Personally motivated by high productivity and happy staff. Concerned about spa therapists high turnover rate. |
| B | Considers the staff motivated and satisfied. Shows his appreciation with daily feedback and recognition in monthly meetings; rewards the best employee of the month with monetary bonus and the best employee of the year with a family day in the spa. Employees are motivated by training possibilities, good interpersonal relationships and manager's enthusiasm. Possibility to buy spa products and use treatments with reduced price. Personally motivated by happy staff, happy clients and high productivity. Concerned about spa therapists high turnover rate. |
| C | Has vague idea about his staff's level of motivation and satisfaction. Considers appreciating and rewards a topic that is slightly overstated. Employees are motivated by good salary and bonus for good sales results; an extra bonus to salary for good sales of products; possibility to buy spa products and use treatments with reduced price. Employees are prohibited to use the spa facilities for leisure purposes – it would not be respectful towards the clients if they share the room with personnel. Personal motivators are high productivity and satisfied clients. Concerned about spa therapists high turnover rate. |

Appendix 3 continued

| Manager | COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION, RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| A | Considers open mind and friendliness a key to mutually satisfying communication and good work performance. Prefers to talk individually; not much time to organise work meetings for all staff nor sharing leisure time. Has always worked with Italians, thus could not comment working with multinational staff. In terms of problem-solving, promotes the idea 'There are no problems, only opportunities'. If any issues arise, the spa therapists turn to him for finding the solutions together. Work goals and job tasks are described in employee manuals that is in the reception to be read by all spa therapists. Expects the employees to read the manuals for a better understanding of their tasks, rights and responsibilities. Makes quality checks few times a year as a 'mystery guest' to detect any shortcomings on proficiency. |
| B | Considers spa therapists' positive attitude and friendly mood essential for offering high-quality services. Tries to be an inspiring role-model with open mind and friendly behaviour. Prefers to talk individually; in case any issues arise, all the team has to work for using this as an opportunity for offering the best solution. Works with Italians; has previous work experience with Thai spa therapists, acknowledges cultural differences. Follows the quality standards carefully by organising systematic meetings for revising them with all staff. Considers the topic very important and takes it as a personal responsibility to discuss the work goals, job tasks, responsibilities and rights with all staff. Before asking the subordinates to follow the rules, they must understand and respect them. Thinks that employees have enough knowledge and authority to act individually in problematic situations. |
| C | Presumes that the staff is well-informed about the company's goals and their daily duties. Organises monthly meetings, where everyone can ask if something is unclear – so far, no problems. Asks employees to read quality standards. Based on customer feedback believes that everyone masters the job tasks and knows her duties and responsibilities. Organises monthly meetings for all staff because he feels that daily interaction at workplace would not be appropriate as clients are always around. Prefers information exchange via e-mails. Does not organise any events on free time. Has always worked with Italians; has no experience with multinational staff. If problems arise the spa therapists let the client know that their problem will be solved and then turn to the manager to ask for help. |
| INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION | |
| A | Asks for spa therapists' comments on the applicability of the products and which are the clients' preferences regarding the treatments. On daily basis, the statistics on productivity convey much information, so there is no need to turn to the other employees. Considers spa therapists' work individual but supports the effort if they work together to explain their clients also other treatments and services, thus guiding them to book another treatment by a colleague. Tries to involve the head-therapist more into his managerial activities. |
| B | Considers spa therapists' contribution essential in developing new treatments and choosing products. Involves employees on discussions about service delivery and customer satisfaction. Prefers to involve employees with longer work experience. Expects the employees to work as a team; all spa therapists should participate in providing clients with memorable experiences. If something goes unplanned, everyone must contribute to the best possible solution. His priority is to work as a team: 'If they dream, it's only a dream; if all together dream, it may become reality' |

Appendix 3 continued

| Manager | INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION (CONTINUED) |
|----------------------------|--|
| C | Spa therapists' are experts in facial and body treatments. Involves employees in creation of new spa menu in case the annual statistics about the use of treatments shows that some offers do not meet the clients' expectations. Considers teamwork skills important because by involving each other more into discussions about colleagues' work specifics, all spa therapists could advice the clients better while working at the spa reception. Is considering involving the head-therapist into his managerial activities (e.g. calculating the monthly productivity). |
| TRAINING AND SKILLS | |
| A | Considers his staff well trained in relation to different massage techniques; language skills could be better. Tries to recruit highly skilful spa therapists to avoid further need for extra training courses. The company gives opportunity to participate in workshops for new knowledge on products but does not finance training courses on massage techniques or improving one's language skills. Since starting to work as a spa manager, has not been to any management-related courses. Has participated in product presentations. |
| B | Considers his staff highly qualified both in practical as well as language skills. The spa therapists can participate in training courses on massage or study languages in case they lack proficiency; the company covers expenses. Considers high proficiency of all staff his priority. Participates in conferences, workshops, seminars in the field of spa and wellness service provision. Holds ISPA membership to stay up-dated on the latest trends and developments. |
| C | Considers his staff quite skilful in massage techniques; has higher expectations towards skills related to beauty treatments. Try to hire spa therapists with experience in giving massage treatments. Sees some room for improvement in the language skills of the employees. The company cannot cover the training expenses, but the employees are allowed to participate in the courses during the working hours. |
| FEEDBACK | |
| A | Tries to talk to employees every day and ask from all spa therapists at work how they are doing, to keep up-dated on daily basis (even if it is only a short talk). Hopes that employees are satisfied with his management style, but has no exact idea about it. Twice a year summons meetings for all staff to discuss everyone's job performance. |
| B | His work routine includes an individual talk with each spa therapist in the beginning or in the end of the workweek. On daily basis, devotes at least 5 min to asking each employee about their work and mood. Often tells the staff to let him know about his own job performance and promotes mutually trusting atmosphere for open communication. |
| C | Admits that not all people are fluent in expressing their ideas and feelings, thus does not expect to have profound conversations with employees about their or his own job performance. As long as everything runs smooth, there is no extra need to summon any meetings. If any issues come up, then talk in person or to all staff. |

Source: Interviews with spa managers, February–March, 2016 (compiled by the author)

Appendix 4. Recommendations for implementing employee empowerment in a spa business setting

| Aspects of empowerment | Recommendations to the spa managers |
|--|---|
| Concept of empowerment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge empowerment as an effective set of actions to detect possible hindrances at challenging work-environments and to support employees to reach their highest efficiency. • Empowerment embraces individual and organisational values, motivation and job satisfaction, interpersonal communication, employees' rights and responsibilities, employee involvement and participation, training needs and level of skills, and feedback. • Share your vision and explain your managerial principles to all staff members to form mutually supportive ground for mastering daily operations and effectively reach company goals. |
| Values and goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilfully design the recruitment process to detect people who share the same values with the company. • Provide (new) employees with training session on company values, goals, service principles and job responsibilities. • Respect yourself and others – this is a base for building good relationships with employees. • Convey trust by giving people meaningful assignments, and provide them authority and resources for successful task performance. • Initiate and support teamwork initiatives; organise team-building events. • Consider the possibility of different perception on values depending on one's cultural background. |
| Motivation and job satisfaction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that proper work conditions and competitive salary is a base for job satisfaction; real motivators for high-quality job performance are opportunity for personal growth, accomplishment, recognition for achievement, responsibility, and interesting or challenging work. • Provide people with challenging and inspiring work environment to allow them learn and grow continuously. • Instead of presuming that each career path should lead to a managerial position, find out employees' real career goals. • Support personal development within the scope of spa therapist's present job position. • Show respect by giving people personal and public recognition in front of the colleagues and senior management, and rewards (e.g. celebrate the accomplishment in a company meeting, organise informal get-togethers, give bonuses, or add another tangible element for their accomplishment). • Form a favourable basis for mutually trusting, helping and inspiring work atmosphere. |

Appendix 4 continued

| Aspects of empowerment | Recommendations to the spa managers |
|--|--|
| Communication, information, rights and responsibilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimize distractions and avoid multitasking while communicating with others. • Face the person talking to you and hear what people have to say. • Ask questions to provide guidance instead of telling others what to do. • Acknowledge employee's expertise and ask for their opinion to increase their sense of importance. • Respect employees' different need for communication; yet, enhance mutually trusting atmosphere for open communication. • Provide employees with full access to information needed for making well-grounded decisions and offering fit solutions. • In case of problems, ask what is wrong with the work structure that led to the service failure, not what is wrong with the people. • Acknowledge the role of employees' cultural background on their perception and response to work empowerment. • Avoid presumptions that are related to the cultural differences; instead, explain your employees your managerial strategy and are your expectations on employees' behavioural and professional conduct. • Compile concise manuals to state clearly the work operations and the proper code of conduct for providing high-level services and maintaining personal well-being at work-site. • Ensure all staff members with clear understanding of their behavioural and responsibility boundaries to avoid any ethical or behavioural misconduct and towards self-respect, responsibility, and privacy. |
| Involvement and participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve each employee in meeting the goals of the company. • Besides an increased exchange of information gradually delegate control to people closest to the actual work processes. • In a pursuit of competitive advantage among similar service providers act upon the idea that it is <i>the people</i> who differentiate one company from the other – everything else can be copied. • Include individuals in different stages of decision-making process. • Ask advice on product development and service design (e.g. about creating new treatments, use of certain productlines, ideas for promotional and discount campaigns). • Foster employee participation by enhancing teamwork approach and initiate reaching the work goals with co-workers. • Making people feel part of a process can lead to their stronger work commitment and higher level of job satisfaction. • Provide employees with coaching and mentoring if they need to improve their skills and increase self-confidence. |

Appendix 4 continued

| Aspects of empowerment | Recommendations to the spa managers |
|----------------------------|---|
| Training and skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map employees' individual study and skills needs. • Provide trainings according to the individual needs (e.g. courses on massage techniques, languages, communication skills, sales, productlines, quality standards). • Support employee's internal desire for personal and professional development. • Help employees to reach proficiency in their present job position. • Provide employees with the tools and authority essential for continuous improvement of their job performance. |
| Feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give constructive and frequent feedback both individually and in staff meetings. • Form a safe and supportive space for smooth communication. • Ask feedback and receive it tactfully regardless of its source and style. • Be a role model in giving and receiving feedback in a diplomatic, clear, well-timed, and competent way. • Consider feedback as someone's impression not as reality, and think what may have caused this perception. • Show appreciation towards each employee's contribution whether by recognition or tangible rewards. |

Source: Armache (2005), Bacon (2006), Covey and Merrill (2006), D'Angelo (2006), Gill et al. (2010), Kandampully (2014), Koc (2013), Kruja et al. (2016), Ye (2012), and the present study results. Compiled by the author.

RESÜMEE

TÖÖTAJATE JÕUSTAMINE ITAALIA SPAADE NÄITEL

Elanikkonna üldine elatustaseme tõus, inimeste suurenenud teadlikkus tervislikest eluviisidest ning heaoluteenuste pakkujate arvu pidev suurenemine esitab spaadele üha kõrgemaid nõudmisi. Teadliku ja nõudliku klientuuri ootustele vastamiseks ning konkurentsivõime suurendamiseks on juhtidele suured ootused seoses professionaalse töötajaskonna loomise ja arendamisega. Heaoluvaldkonnas, kus tööd iseloomustab kliendi ja töötaja vahetu suhtlus nii vestlustasandil kui ka füüsilisel kokkupuutel näohooldus- ja massaaživõtete kasutamisel, on organisatsiooni töötajatel väga tähtis roll kõrge teenindustaseme saavutamisel. Kliendirahulolule suunatud ning kriisiolukordades efektiivselt toimiva meeskonna loomiseks on juhtimis- ja psühholoogiaalases kirjanduses viimastel aastakümnetel ühe enam viidatud jõustava juhtimisstiili eelistele.

Alates 1980ndatest aastatest on jõustamise teemat käsitletud seoses erinevate juhtimisstiilidega ning senini kasutavad juhtimisvaldkonna teoreetikud teooria ja praktika käsitlemisel sagedasti Conger'i ja Kanungo (1988) välja töötatud raamistikku. Jõustamise kontseptsiooni iseloomustab erinevate käsitluste paljus, nt psühholoogiline, struktuurne, motiveeriv jõustamine. Alates 1990ndatest aastatest on hakatud rohkem rääkima jõustamisest heaoluteenuste valdkonnas. Rahvusvahelises heaoluteenuste juhtimise entsüklopeedias (Cannon, 2005, p. 198) kirjeldatakse jõustamist järgnevalt: 'Jõustamine on meetod suurendamaks töötajate kaasatust otsustusprotsessidesse suurendades seeläbi organisatsiooni edukust. Siinjuures on oluline anda töötajatele suuremat autonoomiat enda töökorralduse ja klienditeenindusega seotud otsuste tegemisel, samal ajal kasutades loomingulist lähenemist ja õigustatud riskide võtmist erinevate töösituatsioonide lahendamisel.'

Töö praktilises osas tuginetakse mitmete autorite töödele ja uurimustulemustele. Heaoluteenuste valdkonnas tehtud uuringutega viidatakse enim järgnevadtele autoritele: Armache (2013), Conger ja Kanungo (1988), Eylon ja Au (1999), Kandampully (2001, 2011), Kapiki (2012), Lashley (1995, 2001), ja Spreitzer (1995). Heaolusektoris on

uuritud enamasti restoranitöötajate või hotelli vastuvõtutöötajate jõustamist (Gill et al., 2010; Hocutt & Stone, 1998; Kruja et al. 2016; McDonald, 2004; Namasivayam et al., 2014; Odeh, 2008; Shahril et al., 2013). Spaatöötajate juhtimise ja jõustamisega seotud uurimustöö on märgatavalt tagasihoidlikum (Bielanski et al., 2011; Meng & Han, 2014). Sellest tulenevalt keskendutakse magistritöös spaatöötajate jõustamise uurimisele, et leida vastus probleemküsimusele, kuidas mõjutab juhipoolne jõustamispehmete teadlik kasutamine töötajate motiveeritust ning tööga rahulolu, aidates samas kaasa kliendirahuolu ning töötajate produktiivsuse kasvule.

Töö eesmärk on teoreetilistele käsitlustele ning uurimustulemustele tuginedes esitada spaajuhtidele ettepanekud töötajate jõustamisega seotud pehmete rakendamiseks. Töö eesmärgi saavutamiseks püstitati järgnevad uurimusküsimused: kuidas spaajuhid teadvustavad ja kasutavad jõustamisega seotud pehmeteid ning millised on spaatöötajate jõustamisega seotud ootused ning tegelik kogemus. Spaatöötajatena kaasatakse uuringus massaaži- ja iluprotseduuride tegijad.

Töөөesmärgi saavutamiseks ja uurimusküsimustele vastamiseks seatud ja elluviidud uurimisülesanded olid järgmised: 1) temaatilise kirjanduse analüüs ning teoreetilise käsitluse esitamine jõustamise kontseptsiooni ja käsitluste kohta; 2) uuringu ettevalmistamine ja teostamine (kvalitatiivsel ja kvantitatiivsel meetodil tuginev võrdlev juhtumianalüüs kolme Itaalia spaa näitel, kasutades uurimisvahenditena intervjuud ning kirjalikku ankeetküsitlust); 3) andmeanalüüs ja tulemuste esitamine (intervjuutekstide sisuanalüüs eelnevatel uurimustulemustel põhineva kodeerimise ja teemade klassifitseerimisega; kirjalike ankeetküsitluste analüüsimine Excel 2013 vabavara abil, võrreldes tulemuste keskmisi väärtusi, standardhälvet ning summat); 4) uurimustulemuste arutelu ning jõustamisega seotud ettepanekute tegemine tuginedes spaajuhtide ja -töötajatega tehtud uuringu tulemustele ning kriitilisel kirjandusülevaatel põhinevatele teoreetilistele käsitlustele.

Nimetatud uurimistegevused kajastuvad magistritöö vastavates osades. Lisaks on tööl lõppsõna, kasutatud kirjanduse loetelu 67 allikaga, 4 lisa ning eestikeelne resümee. Töö põhiosas on 9 joonist ning 11 tabelit.

Uuring viidi läbi kolmes Itaalia spaas, kaasates kõik spaatöötajad, kokku kolm juhti ning kolmteist spaatöötajat. Seega oli uurimustöö valim antud kontekstis kõikehõlmav ning vaatamata väiksusest tulenevatele piirangutele uuringutulemuste kasutamise ja üldistamise osas võimaldasid tulemused ning kasutatud uurimisvahendid täita töö eesmärk, esitades spaajuhtidele ettepanekud jõustamispõhimõtete rakendamiseks, kui ka vastata probleemküsimusele laiemalt.

Uurimustulemustest ilmnes spaatöötajate omapära seoses saavutusvajadusega. Vastupidiselt spaajuhtide arvamusele, et iga töötaja eesmärk on jõuda võimalikult kõrgele positsioonile organisatsiooni struktuuris, kui ka mitmete motivatsiooniteoreetikute viitamisest inimeste saavutusvajadusele (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Lyons, 2007; Maslow), märkis vaid üks spaatöötaja igas spaas seda, et peab kõrgemale ametipositsioonile jõudmist motiveerivaks teguriks. Selle asemel toodi üksmeelselt esile kõrged ootused seoses heade töötingimuste, koolitusvõimaluste ning konkurentsivõimelise palgaga. Seega on spaatöötajate puhul oluline saavutada professionaalsus enda ametikohal, s.t. omada vilumust mitmete eriliiki massaažitehnikate osas ning tunda põhjalikult spaahoolitsustel kasutatavaid tooteid. Seetõttu on spaajuhtidel oluline uurida välja töötajate tegelik arenguvajadus ning võimaldada praktiliste oskuste arendamist. Lisaks soovisid spaatöötajad teenistuse suuremat seotust tooteläbimüügiga ning võimalust kasutada füüsilise heaolu taastamiseks spaaruume ja -teenuseid tööst vabal ajal. Spaajuhtide jaoks tähendab see arvestamist finantsressursside ümberpaigutamist, võimaldamaks suuremat rahalist boonust edukate müügitulemuste põhjal. Lisaks tuleb neil mõelda, kuidas täita töötajaskonna suuri ootusi spaaruumide kasutamise osas, kuna füüsilist tööd tegeva töötaja tervise eest hoolitsemine peaks olema iga oma meeskonnast hooliva juhi prioriteet.

Uurimustulemustest ilmnes otsene seos väärtushinnangute jagamise ning iga töötaja töötulemuste vahel. Nimelt, spaades, kus juht pidas organisatsiooni väärtuste ja eesmärkide teadmist ja jagamist oluliseks ning tutvustas neid isiklikult kogu personalile, hindasid ka töötajad ühisväärtusi oluliseks. Lisaks arvati, et organisatsiooni väärtuste ja

eesmärkide jagamine aitab kaasa iga töötaja töösoorituse paranemisele. Spaades, kus juhid arvasid, et teema on piisavalt hästi lahti seletatud töötaja käsiraamatutes ning iga töötaja saab teemaga ise tutvuda, ei olnud töötajad väärtuste ja eesmärkidega kursis ning ei osanud neid ühendada ka töötulemustega.

Oluline erinevus ilmnis ka spaatöötajate koolitusvõimaluste osas. Kuigi üksmeelselt pidasid kõrget oskuste taset oluliseks nii juhid kui ka spaatöötajad, võimaldati asutuse kulul erialaseid massaaži- või võõrkeeleskust parandada vaid ühes spaas. Teised spaajuhid tõid põhjenduseks finantsressursi puudumise ning proovisid kõrget teenustaset saavutada ja hoida vilunud töötajate ja hea keeleoskusega töötajate palkamisega. Lisaks pidasid spaajuhid ja töötajad üksmeelselt tähtsaks positiivset õhkkonda heade töötulemuste saavutamiseks ning tagasiside saamist enda töösoorituse kohta. Kui kõik juhid olid arvamusel, et nad on avatud suhtlejad, siis uurimistulemuste kohaselt oli igas spaas töötajate suhtlemine juhiga väga erinev, viidates kas vähesele infoliikuvusele või suutmatusele edastada konstruktiivset tagasisidet.

Uurimustulemuste koondarutelu hõlmas seitset valdkonda: väärtused ja eesmärgid, motivatsioon ja töörahuolu; suhtlemine, infovahendamine ning töötajate õigused ja kohustused; töötajate kaasamine; koolitusvõimalused ja oskused; ning tagasiside andmine nii töötajatele kui ka juhile. Arutelu käigus esitati soovitusi jõustamispõhimõtete kasutamiseks töötajate rahulolu ja motivatsiooni suurendamiseks. Pöörates oma juhtimistegevuses tähelepanu uurimustöös käsitletud teemadele, on suurem võimalus leida põhjuseid, mis võiksid takistada töötajate motiveeritust, rahulolu ning parimat töösooritust, ning töös esitatud ettepanekute abil kaasa aidata töötajate tööefektiivsuse ja entusiasmi tõusule. Töö lisade hulgas on jõustamise teoreetilisele käsitlemisele ning selle magistritöö käigus tehtud uuringu tulemustele tuginevad soovitusel spaajuhtidele, kuidas kasutada töötajate motivatsiooni, rahulolu ja tööefektiivsuse tõstmiseks igapäevases meeskonnajuhtimises jõustamisega seotud põhimõtteid.

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IMPLICATIONS OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT IN A SPA BUSINESS SETTING – THE CASE OF ITALIAN SPAS

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